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Addressing Migrant Children's Education in the United States

Abstract: Although the U.S. has prioritized universal education to all residents, only ten percent of migrant students graduate from high school. This paper explores specific barriers migrant farmworkers' children face to educational attainment. It then proceeds to employ capability, utilitarian, ethical, and moral arguments to appeal to a social responsibility to help the migrant student population. By critically examining current legislation aimed to address these barriers, this paper will identify various policy measures that will be a step to foster educational capability in migrant students. A more robust federal role, bilingual early education, after-school and summer programs, and requirements for highly qualified teachers are all measures this paper introduces to achieve these ends. In order to attain educational equity in our Nation, the needs of the most disadvantaged students must be met.

Tags: capability, bilingual education, early childhood education, migrant farmworkers, immigration

By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of the Nation.

-Justice Thurgood Marshall

I. Introduction and Background

Demographics of Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers

In the United States, nearly 2.5 million agricultural workers known as migrant and seasonal farm workers (MSFW) labor on farms and ranches, cultivating and harvesting crops and raising and tending to livestock (Farmworker Justice). The U.S. Department of Labor’s National Agricultural Workers Survey (“NAWS”) provides an economic and demographic portrait of crop workers and workers engaged in support activities for crop production at their workplaces (Farmworker Justice)¹.

Hired farmworkers make up approximately one-third of all those working on farms; of that one third, approximately 71 percent, or 1,775,000 workers, are immigrants. Of these, 95 percent (1,686,250 workers) were from Mexico, 3 percent (53,250 workers) were from Central America, and 2 percent (35,500 workers) from other countries (Farmworker Justice). *Figure 1* illustrates the distribution of migrant farmworkers by country of origin in the form of a pie chart. The share of hired crop farmworkers who were not legally authorized to work in the U.S. grew from roughly 15 percent in 1989-91 to almost 55 percent in 1999-2001; since then it has fluctuated around 50 percent, or 1,250,000 people. From 2001 to now, the share that are citizens has increased from about 21 percent to about 33 percent, while the share who hold green cards or other forms of work authorization has fallen from about 25 percent to about 19 percent (U.S.

¹ This survey examines the characteristics of workers on farms and in orchards, greenhouses and nurseries, grains, and field crops, as well as all fruits and vegetables. However, it does not include workers in all types of agricultural production; it excludes livestock, poultry, and fishery employees. The NAWS includes questions about immigration status and reports on workers regardless of immigration status, except that it does not report on the characteristics of workers who hold H-2A temporary agricultural guest-worker visas

Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service).

Farmworker Country of Origin by Population

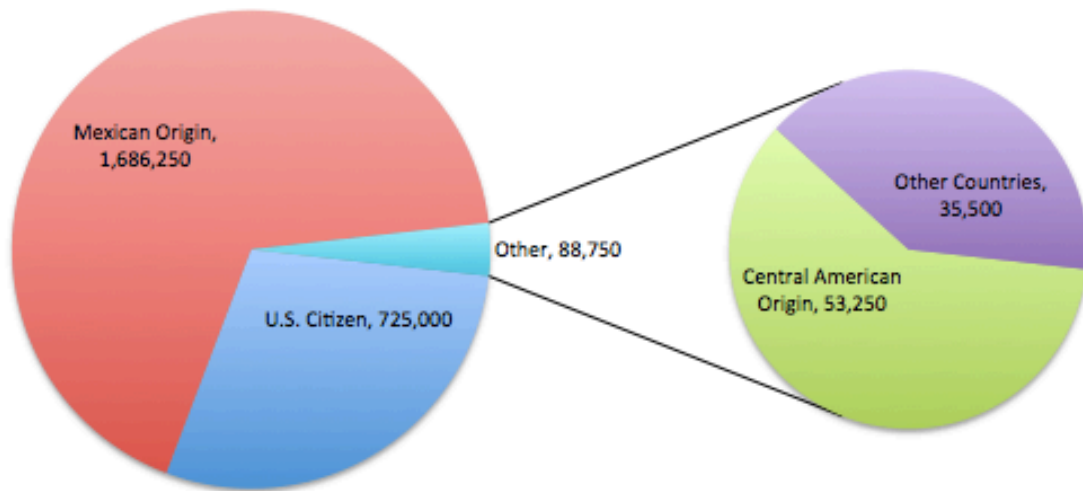


Figure 1: Country of Origin by Population

Hired farmworkers have the second highest unemployment rate out of the U.S. Census Bureau's population survey. They exceed the unemployment rates of transportation and shipping workers, production and service workers, and all other occupations, only falling behind construction and extraction workers by less than one percent in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau). Due to the seasonal nature of the work, the large majority of crop workers do not work year round even if they work for more than one farm in a single year. On average, about 84 percent of farmworkers work more than 60 days a year; 77 percent work more than 90 days; and only 60 percent work more than 180 days (Farmworker Justice).

The average farmworker family's total income is \$17,500- \$19,999. Yet, the federal poverty level for a family of 3 is \$19,790. Consequently, twenty-five percent of all farmworkers (625,000 individuals) had a family income below the federal poverty line (Farmworker Justice)². The burden of poverty does not only fall on the worker himself, roughly 54 percent of hired farmworkers are married and another 65 percent have children. 49 percent of hired farmworkers live in a household with children under the age of 18 (Farmworker Justice).

Educational Disadvantage of MSFWs' Children

Over the past decades, the United States government has enacted various legislative reforms to help mitigate the poverty of these migrant families. However, educational disadvantages persist. Migrant farmworkers' children have the highest dropout rate of any group in the country, ranging from 45 to 60 percent (Wiseman, 49). The high school graduation rate for migrant children is even lower, with only 10 percent of migrant children completing the twelfth grade (49). The average migrant farm worker only has five to 5.5 years of formal education and many are not even literate in their native language (50). Education is one of the most influential factors that may alleviate the intergenerational cycle of poverty. However, without adequate resources, the cumulative disadvantages of belonging to this population could overwhelm any opportunity to pursue educational achievement.

The United States government and American citizens have an obligation to provide the resources necessary for migrant children to be sufficiently educated. Although many attempts have been made to provide these resources, previous efforts have not yielded their desired outcomes. In order to effectively combat the various barriers migrant children face to education,

² This source adds that this statistic may be underreported due to various complicating factors

there must be more robust federal role in migrant children's education, after-school and summer enrichment-based programming, along with various provisions that would attract highly qualified teachers to working with these students. While these students may face unique obstacles, they have just as much opportunity and potential as any other child to contribute to social and economic progress, or wellbeing, if they are given the supports necessary to succeed.

II. Current State of Migrant Children's Educational Attainment

Barriers to Success

Myriad external and internal factors mitigate a migrant student's ability to pursue high levels of educational attainment. Children of migrant farm workers, fishery workers, and factory workers are among the most educationally disadvantaged children in the United States (Green, 52). The conditions of a migratory lifestyle impose significant obstacles to social and educational achievement: social and cultural isolation, strenuous and hazardous work, extreme poverty, poor health conditions, and limited English proficiency (Green, 52).

The most deleterious obstacle to educational attainment among migrant students is the language barrier. The majority of migrant students enter the US education system with low levels of English language proficiency; in the United States today, there are more than 5.1 million children under the age of six whose parents are undocumented (Cortez). Many times the student's parents are even illiterate in both English and Spanish. In turn, it is nearly impossible to compete at the same level as their English-speaking peers. As a compounding effect, teachers rarely have the time to teach these "temporary" students how to read/write/speak English. The language barrier is the most fundamental obstacle for a migrant student to realize their full potential. Without proper knowledge of the English language, a student has virtually no chance of competing at the same level as his or her native peers.

Furthermore, there is widespread consensus that low-income and minority groups experience an achievement gap between their academic performance and their mostly middle-class white peers. Students from low-income and minority backgrounds are often not as school ready as higher-income, white students. Scholars have attributed this lag in school readiness to a lower rate of word exposure during imperative years of development (Shonkoff, 2013). This disadvantage, in effect, proliferates every summer due to what is known as the “summer slide”. Students from lower-income, minority backgrounds do not have the same level of exposure to educationally stimulating activities; this leads to diminishing reading comprehension scores in the fall (Shonkoff, 2013). Even more, many migrant students spend their entire summers working in agricultural fields to help support their families (Kim). A study found that students of low socioeconomic status suffered a 1.90-point decline in reading comprehension test scores, whereas high-SES students experienced a 46.58-point gain in test scores over the summer months, (K.L. Alexander). A nearly 48-point gap demonstrates the educational disadvantage of low-SES children. When these students return to school in the fall, they have to review much of the same material; meanwhile, their white peers of a higher socioeconomic status are able to cover new topics from the beginning. There is no reason to believe that the established relationship between economic security and educational advantage in citizen students does not apply to migrant students. This also suggests that increasing education of migrant students could improve their economic security and vice versa. We can also presume that comparative economic insecurity among migrant students heightens their available educational disadvantages.

One significant obstacle is that migrant students must fight against cultural stereotypes and stigmatization that obstruct their ability to integrate. In her study of migrant education,

Michele Romanowski found many teachers who were unaware of their own beliefs about migrant students. They were, in fact, influenced by stereotypes that guided their behavior and actions, effectively constructing another barrier for migrant students (28-9). These types of implicit or unconscious biases can produce discriminatory results even in the absence of the intent to discriminate. Romanowski stresses the importance of cultural relevancy in teachers' attempts to meet the unique needs of their migrant students in order to avoid the cultural conflicts, disconnects, and misunderstandings which can diminish the relationship between migrant students' and their teachers (31). She claims teachers must learn to understand, respect, and integrate the culture of migrant students in the daily workings of school. Only then can migrant students attain academic success and realize their full potential (32).

The transitory nature of migrant families poses another significant obstacle to educational attainment. This factor often compels natives of the host community to construct the migrant student as temporary and only in need of minimal help (Hamann et. al., 9). Judy Wiseman asserts that frequent moves in search of agricultural work causes children to be uprooted from school (50). She states that this leads to low student performance, with 41% low achievement versus 26% of students who have never moved (50). This also causes poor peer relationships and isolation. Wiseman claims that migrant students feel estranged from their English-speaking peers. They are often regarded with disdain and considered ignorant due to their inability to communicate in English. Weak peer relationships are consequently shown to create a disinterest in school and have a downward spiraling effect on academics (Wiseman, 58).

Yet another factor that impedes children of migrant workers from achieving academically is the fact they are working long hours in addition to schooling. There are an estimated 126,000 US agricultural workers between the ages of 14 and 17. The Human Rights Watch found that:

“In agriculture, children typically work what would be considered “adult hours” starting at the ages of 11 or 12. However, many begin to work part-time much earlier: Human Rights Watch has interviewed child farmworkers as young as seven. These children often work 10 or more hours a day: at the harvest peak they work daylight to dusk, up to seven days a week. Schoolchildren typically work weekends, summers, and before and after school” (Coursen-Neff).

The U.S. *Federal Fair Labor Standards Act* provides no minimum age for children working on small farms, given their parent’s permission. Children may work for hire on any farm with parental consent from age 12, and there are no legal limits on the hours children can work in agriculture outside of school (Coursen-Neff). These students feel even more alienated from their peers who do not have to work. Also, work is an interruption that keeps the migrant student from performing to the best of their ability in school. They often come to school in a state of exhaustion (Wiseman, 65). Migrant children often drop out because they are enticed by the financial rewards of fieldwork and discouraged by academic failure at school (Schmidt).

Current Program Effectiveness

Migrant Education Program

There are a number of educational programs in effect that assist the migrant student in the United States. The Migrant Education Program is authorized by Title 1 Part C of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Wiseman, 50). In the Act, Congress asserts, “... a high quality education for all individuals is a societal good, morally imperative, and ultimately improves the life of every individual because the quality of our individual lives depends on the quality of the lives of others” (50-51). This demonstrates a national commitment to providing fair and equal educational opportunities for all individuals residing in the United States. MEP primarily provides individual states with grants to help migrant students overcome cultural barriers, language difficulties, and educational disruptions (51). A child qualifies for MEP if they have

moved within a 36 month period, with a parent or guardian seeking seasonal or temporary agricultural or fishing work (51). Because each state's requirements and standards in curriculum and testing differ, migrant students suffer when they move to different states. Even the brightest migrant student is in jeopardy of failing if they must adapt to a new curriculum with each move (51).

The development of the Migrant Education Program shows the United States has taken serious measures to provide the unique supports required for migrant student's to take advantage of educational opportunities. However, we can also see that the latitude states are given in determining the focus of their resource allocation drastically obstructs the effectiveness of these measures. I will later address the claim that the U.S. government needs to impose the barebones outline of a national standardized curriculum for migrant students in order to ensure the program's effectiveness at the state-level. Additionally, funds distributed by the federal government to states for this program need to have explicit objectives so that migrant children in every state have access to the same resources and advantages.

Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS)

Another necessity for ensuring maximal opportunity for success among migrant students is a national record transfer system. The MSRTS was initially introduced as an additional provision of the MEP. It functioned as a central reservoir for students' school and health record to help combat the problematic nature of students frequently moving to new school districts. If a student were to move to a new district, the school's administration would only have to access their information from a national database which would increase transition speed and access to vital information (Wiseman, 52). However, this program was eliminated in 1995 when the Secretary of Education claimed it was ineffective and costly (52). Problems arose when migrant

students moved to states with lower migrant populations or back to Mexico, places that lacked access to the MSRTS. There were various efforts to reinstate this system on behalf of the migrant students it served; however, these efforts were dismissed because the elimination of the program did not prove to be an “irreparable injury” since migrant parents could simply take their children’s records with them as they moved (52). As of 2002, there have been no additional efforts to establish a transfer mechanism for migrant students’ records.

Migrant and Seasonal Head Start

The Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program was established in 1965 to provide children of migrant workers with comprehensive preschool education and day care (Mathur and Parameswaran, 4). Since it is based on the Head Start program, MSHS employs special strategies to address the impediments to school readiness migrant students face (4). However, many academics have conducted studies that find that the majority of eligible migrant students are not enrolled in such programs due to inadequate funding (5). Although the MSHS is distinct from Head Start itself, preschool services must meet all Head Start Program Performance Standards:

They are obligated to provide health screen and preventive health care services as well as lunches/snacks that embody at least one-third of their clients’ daily caloric requirements with nutritional foods. MSHS programs are also required to adhere to teacher-child staff ratios and staff certification requirements (Mathur and Parameswaran, 5).

Mathur and Parameswaran claim that the quality of these programs is roughly comparable with that of the larger Head Start program (5). Because the majority of migrant students enter preschool with little knowledge of the English language, these programs are equipped to support the continued development of Spanish language skills along with English acquisition (5). Additionally, according to the requirements of Head Start programs, MSHS employs direct tactics to engage parents. The MSHS program also offers bilingual educational services to parents and brings parenting instruction classes directly into their homes (5). Mathur and

Parameswaran claim that the MSHS program seems very effective on the surface, nevertheless he identifies major constraints on MSHS and its school readiness effects.

They identify the three major constraints as follows: program resources, subsequent loss of readiness effects, and punitive public policies (5). They site Takanashi's findings that MSHS programs struggle to provide students with a dearth of well-qualified and experienced teachers that are able to deliver bilingual instruction and have an adequate knowledge of Hispanic/Mexican culture (5). A number of academic studies corroborate the fact that even though the program was designed to include a balance of English and Spanish language lessons, very little instruction in Spanish occurred due to this lack of bilingual personnel (6). Studies to pilot an experimental bilingual program designed for Spanish-speaking children found that the protocol was not followed because predominantly English-speaking teachers used much less Spanish language instruction than the researchers had anticipated (5). On the whole, however, they find that public school districts have neglected the needs of migrant students and this, in turn, undermines the positive influence of MSHS. Even despite the growing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of students in American public schools, over 90 percent of all teachers in the United States are of European heritage; "even though research has firmly established that bringing the culture of children's homes into classroom instruction and curriculum can enhance learning experiences, school systems continue to demand that all students quickly embrace school cultures grounded in mainstream norms" (Mathur and Parameswaran, 6).

III. Benefits of Early Childhood Education Intervention

In light of current literature, it is fair to say that early childhood education is becoming one of the foremost concerns of U.S. education policy. It is now clear that it is during these

formative years that the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and their middle-class white peers starts and grows. Intervention during this critical period has the most potential to even the playing field for minority and low-income students. Evidence suggests that high-quality preschool programs are generally effective in raising the school readiness of children from low-income households, including members of ethnic/racial minority groups (Mathur and Parameswaran, 2). Scholars have found that children of Mexican immigrants are far less likely to be enrolled in pre-school programs; consequently, they are not school ready upon entering kindergarten (2). In identifying important aspects of school readiness, Mathur and Parameswaran state:

An important component of school readiness is empowering the migrant child with cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills that ensure academic success in elementary school. Additional school readiness implies readiness on part of teachers and early childhood education programs as well as family readiness (2).

If we address these important factors through early childhood intervention measures, migrant students will be better prepared and more capable of achieving at an academic level competitive with their middle-class, white peers.

In an attempt to illustrate the short and long-term effects of preschool education, Steven Barnett employs several longitudinal studies that assess young children's learning and development. He initially states that multiple studies have estimated preschool education to produce an average immediate effect of 7 or 8 points on an IQ test, or a move from the 30th to the 50th percentile for achievement test scores (Barnett). He specifically highlights the Perry Preschool study conducted by Heckman. The High/Scope Perry Preschool program randomly assigned 128 disadvantaged minority children to either a half-day preschool program with home visits by the teachers or a control group (Barnett). Heckman found an effect of approx. 0.90 standard deviations—the size of the typical black/white test score gap—on language and general

cognitive abilities after two years (Barnett). He also found a persistent effect on achievement tests through middle school. In addition, the preschool group had better classroom and personal behavior, less involvement in delinquency, fewer special education placements, and a higher high school graduation rate (Barnett). Through 40 years of age, attending this preschool was associated with increased employment and earnings, decreased welfare dependency, and reduced arrests (Barnett). High school graduation actually increased from one-half to two-thirds of the preschool group. These findings led Barnett to conclude that well-designed preschool education programs³ produce long-term improvements in school success. The evidence additionally suggests that economically disadvantaged children reap long-term benefits from preschool.

IV. Our Ethical, Political, and Moral Responsibility to Alleviate Deprivation

Poverty as Capability or Freedom

There are a number of ways one could conceptualize moral and ethical responsibilities to alleviate the educational challenges faced by migrant students. Martha Nussbaum discusses the capability framework, which she claims is the best space to make comparisons of life quality (Creating Capabilities, 18). Capabilities attempt to encapsulate all the most important elements of individuals' quality of life, as they are plural and qualitatively distinct: Nussbaum asserts health, bodily integrity, and education cannot be reduced into a single metric (18). The capabilities approach primarily focuses on the opportunities available to each person; emphasizing the importance of freedom or choice between said opportunities (18). It ascribes an urgent task to government and public policy to improve the quality of life for all people, as defined by their capabilities (19).

³ Programs with small class sizes and well-educated teachers who receive adequate pay

Nussbaum extrapolates her approach by specifying that capabilities are not just innate abilities, but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, economic, and social environment (20). She claims if a government promotes capabilities it is, by extension, promoting freedom (25). In determining the significance of education as a capability, it is essential to consider the concepts of corrosive disadvantage and fertile functionings. Corrosive disadvantage is a deprivation that has particularly large effects in other areas of life (44). Educational deprivation can therefore be considered a corrosive disadvantage; inadequate education has deleterious effects on income, health outcomes, career choice, etc. At the same time, Nussbaum states that education can also be a fertile functioning—a functioning that tends to promote other related capabilities. Identifying corrosive disadvantages and fertile functionings is important in determining the best intervention points for public policy (45). By fostering educational capabilities, a government can kill many proverbial birds with one stone.

The current status of education among children of migrant workers compounds their poverty. Without adequate education, a migrant student is confined to choices among a narrow collection of functionings. This type of poverty breeds disadvantage. Educational deprivation can be categorized as a basic need in today's society where one even needs a GED to flip burgers. This is made clear by the government's prioritization of universal educational opportunity. Thus, according to Nussbaum, there is political and moral importance in fulfilling the need for equal educational opportunity; specifically among those who encounter obstacles to achievement due to unique sociocultural and historical factors. I purport that if our Nation's educational structure is formed in a way in which migrant students are unequally positioned to succeed relative to their

peers, the government and society-at-large have an obligation to alleviate their unique deprivation.

Civil Rights

Yet another fact that begs political responsibility to provide equal educational opportunity is that the US government is bound to provide primary and secondary education to all resident children of the United States. When the US Department of Education created the Migrant Education Program in 1965, they committed themselves to the goals of providing migrant students with appropriate education services that address their special needs, and of ensuring that such children receive full and appropriate opportunities to meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards that all children are expected to meet (“Migrant Education Program”). Even more, in *Lau vs. Nichols* 1974, the courts ruled that providing the same all-English educational programs to non-English-speaking children was unlawful. As a result, public schools must provide an education to all children, including undocumented immigrant children (*Cortez*). Simply put, the goal of the Migrant Education Program is to ensure that all migrant students reach challenging academic standards and graduate with a high school diploma (or complete a GED) that prepares them for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment. Through this program, states are allocated funds for migrant student support services such as: academic instruction; remedial and compensatory instruction; bilingual and multicultural instruction; vocational instruction; career education services; special guidance; counseling and testing services; health services; and preschool services (“Migrant Education Program”).

Civil rights demand that the government provide migrant students with an adequate education, even if they require additional resources to overcome obstacles to educational

attainment. It is clear from migrant students' low graduation rates and low educational attainment that states have not adequately navigated the various barriers migrant students face to educational achievement. Current programs and services are not sufficiently supporting children of migrant workers; thus, the education system and the Migrant Education Program are failing their target populations. The US government, or perhaps individual states, needs to reassess and restructure their approach to ensure that migrant students' are similarly positioned to succeed relative to their peers.

Some may argue that these political and moral responsibilities do not extend to those members of society who are noncitizens, despite the extension of universal education. However, Mark Greenberg and Shawn Fremstad argue that noncitizen families should have the same eligibility for all public assistance as citizen families. They assert that if it is in the national interest for all children to be ready for school and grow up to be the most productive citizens they can be, it is shortsighted to deny noncitizen children the same access to health care, adequate nutrition, and stable housing as citizen children (Haskins et. Al., 1). Extending these additional civil rights to noncitizen children might be their only chance of navigating the various barriers they face to pursuing a life they value.

Utilitarian Perspective

From a utilitarian perspective, the government and society-at-large have a vested interest in creating equal educational opportunity that would foster migrant students' capability sets. As a Nation, a top priority is social progress; progress can be conceived in terms of improvements in society that are indispensable and almost inevitable, economic growth and progress are vital goals (Moore). Progress can also be defined as an improvement in the wellbeing of human beings. Educational deprivation, as stated earlier, severely limits the freedom of a subset of our

population to contribute to societal progress by constraining their choice of functionings. We see the detrimental consequences of a lack of educational opportunity among migrant students in Justice Thurgood Marshall's quote presented above. He claims that by denying migrant students basic education, we have foreclosed any realistic possibility that these students will be able to contribute to the larger progress, or improvement in wellbeing, of our Nation. Migrant students are not the only members of society that are negatively impacted by their capability poverty. Educational intervention on behalf of this population then could, in fact, be self-serving.

Immigrants play a crucial role in the economic progress of the United States; they make economic contributions that increase the overall wellbeing of U.S. society-at-large. Academics have argued that legalizing undocumented workers and fixing our broken immigration system would have largely positive effects for our economic system as a whole. One of the ways that immigrants better our economy is by boosting demand for consumer goods (Immigration's Role in Building a Strong American Economy). According to the 2010 American Community Survey, immigrants earned a total of \$1.1 trillion. In addition, the Immigration Policy Center estimates that the purchasing power of Latinos and Asians, many of whom are immigrants, alone will reach \$1.5 trillion and \$775 billion, respectively, by 2015. Educating these same immigrants could only increase their purchasing power and increase demand for local goods. Educated immigrants are more likely to have higher median incomes later on. Economists also argue that immigrants contribute to their communities and fill critical job needs. The Brookings Institute found that while immigrants represent 16 percent of the workforce, foreign-born workers account for over 20 percent of workers in agriculture, construction, food services, and information technology. They are agricultural laborers, domestic workers, and cabdrivers, as well as health care workers, computer software engineers and medical scientists. The U.S.

Census Bureau also found that immigrants are more likely to be working-age. The Pew Research group estimates that, given current trends, a considerable portion of growth of the Nation's working-age population between now and 2050 will be attributed to immigrants and their U.S. born children (Immigration's Role in Building a Strong American Economy). In order to contribute in a meaningful way to this population, and to increase their potential role within the economy itself, it is necessary for the U.S. government to provide additional educational resources to help contribute to the immigrant population's wellbeing.

It can be argued that increasing the relative capability of migrant students would negatively impact prospective employment opportunities for American citizens by increasing competition. However, in this case, the migrant students would not be provided any educational advantage relative to their peers, it would only level the playing field. Also, competition is inherent to our political and economic ideology as a Nation; we believe that competition leads to the best economic and political outcomes, therefore an increase in competition could only benefit society overall. Additionally, increasing the freedom of migrant students would have a positive impact on their ability to contribute to society-at-large. Thus, on a broader scale, educational intervention would be beneficial to the rest of society as well.

Privilege

In addressing another call for moral responsibility, one must look at the phenomenon of privilege. Young argues that persons who benefit from structural injustice have special moral responsibilities to contribute to organized efforts to correct them, not because they are to blame for them, but because they have more resources and are able to adapt to changed circumstances without suffering serious deprivation (387). She claims that where there are structural injustices, there are not only victims of those injustices; there are persons who acquire relative privileges by

virtue of these structures. Then, with respect to structural injustices that create unequal educational opportunities for migrant students, those who benefit from these unequal opportunities have an obligation to correct them due to their relative positions of power (387).

Students with scarce barriers to educational achievement benefit from the educational deprivation of migrant students because they do not have to compete for allocation of resources. On a larger scale, employers benefit from the economic positioning of migrant workers: they fill jobs that are undesirable to the rest of the population, work for low pay and no benefits, and are often so uneducated that they offer little resistance against unfair and unsafe treatment. Additionally, the majority of society benefits from lower prices of agricultural goods. With this in mind, it is fair to assert that we all, as members of society, have an obligation to collectively correct the structural inequalities that leave children of migrant workers at a comparative disadvantage. Those in a position of privilege are not vulnerable to suffering serious deprivation by extending educational opportunities that might take into account the special circumstances of migrant students.

V. Policy Implications

Nationally Standardized Curriculum for Migrant Students?

Countries around the world have already imposed national standardized curriculum within their countries with positive results. This is not the first time a national curriculum for migrant students has been proposed. A group of researchers employed by the U.S. Education Department found that development of a national curriculum, would provide some continuity "so when a child moved from the southern part of Texas to the middle part of Wisconsin, the fact he was on the road three days would not make him six months behind" (Education Week). However, existing legacies of local control throughout the United States frustrate any attempt to

approach a federally mandated curriculum. So, in this case, merely making the federal government's role in state education more robust would function as a pragmatic compromise.

The extent to which states are allowed latitude poses a problem for migrant students because it results in unequal distributions of resources for these students at the national level.

Paige and Esposito state:

While the U.S. government recognizes state autonomy, it also explicitly permits Congress the power "to provide for the general welfare of the United States." In instances where states are failing to ensure the general welfare of their citizenry, it is wholly appropriate for the federal government to provide direct aid to states for the purpose of supporting public elementary and secondary schools.

The current educational outcomes of the migrant population, as demonstrated by their graduation and dropout rates, attest to the fact that states are failing to ensure the general welfare of their citizenry. The No Child Left Behind Act made federal intervention in state's educational outcomes a universal phenomenon. It is the first piece of legislation to mandate that public school teachers must meet certain requirements to be allowed to teach (Paige and Esposito). In the past ten years, the federal government's contribution to education has increased over one-third from 1990-2004 (U.S. Department of Education). More states currently allocate more revenue to education than any other spending category; they determine their funding to each school district on the basis of how many students the district enrolls (Paige and Esposito).

Critics of local autonomy to specify curriculum claim that it frequently leads to wide disparities in curricular quality (Paige and Esposito). Even more, the mobility of migrant students compounds the negative outcomes of local control. I argue that we increase the federal government's role in ensuring the educational welfare of migrant students by introducing more strict criteria for the allocation of MEP funds. The federal government should make clear, at least in states with high migrant populations, a specific structure or outline for migrant educational

curriculum, so that migrant students are not unduly burdened by the transitory nature of their families' work. I am not, however, arguing for a comprehensive or rigid national curriculum because I recognize that a state may be best suited for determining the needs of its population.

An additional counterargument to the formation of a federally mandated migrant curriculum is the controversy and reported failures of Common Core requirements. The Common Core State Standards are a move in the direction towards standardizing what is taught in schools across the U.S. (U.S. News and World Report). While there is widespread criticism of effectiveness, I find that most critics take issue with the use of sanctions as the main tool of the Federal Accountability System.

Alternatives to Federal Accountability System

Mintrop and Sunderman propose alternatives to the current accountability regime. They state that current educational accountability systems are composed of broad standards for subject matter content and skills, standardized tests to indicate performance, and performance targets and quotas to determine over and underperformance. Sanctions are the primary means by which the federal government puts pressure on schools, districts, and states, to take the central performance demands seriously (Mintrop and Sunderman). These authors claim that this system stipulates the targeting of underperforming schools with increasingly severe sanctions based on performance quotas for specific demographic groups. This stipulation put a very high burden on schools with diverse student populations; by distinctly emphasizing student subgroups, the NCLB increased the number of goals each school had to reach and, consequently, increased the likelihood of failure among diverse schools (Kim & Sunderman, 2005; Linn, 2005; Novak, 2003). The potential sanctions range from identification and publication of "school improvement" status to takeover of the organization (Mintrop and Sunderman).

What is more perplexing, research regarding the outcomes of high-stakes testing and accountability policies prior to NCLB was “mixed, inconclusive, and often contradictory” and there was little evidence on the mechanism through which accountability policies affect student achievement or the achievement gap (Lee, 2007, 2008 as cited by Mintrop and Sunderman). These authors claim that NCLB adopted this standard of performance as a measure for purposes of ease and feasibility. However, there is evidence that teachers in low-achieving schools have strong incentives to adopt practices that inflate test scores to demonstrate larger gains and avoid sanctions (Koretz, 2008, as cited by Mintrop and Sunderman). Consequently, it does not seem intuitively plausible that using high-risk testing as a performance indicator would yield positive results in student achievement. Moreover, the corrective action and restructuring options⁴ stipulated under the NCLB to compel compliance by the states do not work across the board and are often accompanied by negative side effects (Mintrop and Trujillo, 2005). These authors finally purport that the combination of uncertain outcomes, and the difficulties of carrying out the law’s regulations day-to-day jointly indicate that the current system is failing.

As an alternative, Mintrop and Sunderman propose accountability systems that sets targets pegged to real growth achieved by a sizable number of demographically-similar, high performing Title 1 schools. They claim that, while state orientations and state tests are good monitoring devices, school quality should be assessing in terms of multiple indicators that cover a wide range of educational goals and valued outcomes (Mintrop and Sunderman). The federal government must change its methods of evaluating school performance and inducing state compliance so that teachers are better motivated to educate their students rather than cater their instruction to inflate test scores.

⁴ such as reconstitution, charter school conversion, or takeover by education management organizations (EMOs),

Highly Qualified Teachers

One of the most positive measures introduced by the No Child Left Behind Act was the provision for Highly Qualified Teachers or *HQTs*. To be deemed highly qualified, teachers must have: 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) prove that they know each subject they teach (Department of Education, No Child Left Behind). The Act required states to measure the extent to which all students have highly qualified teachers, adopt goals and plans to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified, and publicly report plans and progress in meeting teacher quality goals (Department of Education, No Child Left Behind). Finally, teachers in middle and high school must demonstrate competency in the subject they teach⁵. I propose we must introduce policy measures to help school districts attract highly qualified candidates to critical need vacancies. I assert that we must offer premiums and incentives to highly qualified potential teachers to attract them to such a critical field as migrant early childhood education.

Above all, we must demand a much higher level of requirements for Early Childhood Education teachers. Highly qualified teachers will be better able to take advantage of the ability to intervene at such a critical period during a child's development. A possible qualifying criterion to consider is the candidates' level of cultural sensitivity. Wiseman asserted that cultural miscommunications and stereotypes seriously inhibit the teacher-student relationship. Moreover, Mathur and Parameswaran identify teacher stereotypes and implicit biases as one of the most harmful factors associated with current Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs. Virtually

⁵ Teachers (in middle and high school) must prove that they know the subject they teach with: 1) a major in the subject they teach, 2) credits equivalent to a major in the subject, 3) passage of a state-developed test, 4) HOUSSSE (for current teachers only, see below), 5) an advanced certification from the state, or 6) a graduate degree (Department of Education, No Child Left Behind).

every state requires public school teachers to complete a specified number of professional development hours in order to renew their licenses. A majority of these states require 6 semester hours of professional development every three to seven years (Paige and Esposito, 38). In light of evidence of the deleterious effects of cultural insensitivity, it seems reasonable that a state would require cultural sensitivity training as a component of this professional development. With increased cultural sensitivity training, we can help ensure that the most vulnerable students in terms of educational opportunity and advantage have access to their most powerful advocates.

Moreover, the teaching profession attracts a markedly high number of candidates with comparatively low academic ability, as defined by college entrance exams. Results show that students with low-test scores are more prone to major in education and become teachers than those with the highest scores (Henke et. al., 1996 as referenced by Paige and Esposito). There is a contentious debate among those who demand higher quality teachers. Critics of the current education system eventually diverge into two camps, (1) those that believe we should lower barriers to teaching in order to attract talented candidates, and (2) those that believe we should increase qualifications and credentials to ensure high quality teachers (Paige and Esposito, 2004). Alternative certification programs allow candidates to circumvent some of the existing state certification requirements. Although they typically require preparatory coursework to be completed after school, these alternatives generally permit teachers to begin working more quickly. It is estimated that more than 200,000 individuals have been licensed through alternative routes (Paige and Esposito, 2004). Student performance shows that alternatively certified teachers perform as well as teachers licensed through traditional routes (Ballou and Podgursky, 1999; Shen, 1997). They also tend to have higher scores on state licensing exams and are a source of racial and ethnic minority teachers. To illustrate, 48 percent of California teachers in

alternative routes were members of underrepresented ethnic groups (Paige and Esposito, 2004). Many of the most academically accomplished potential teaching candidates have invested a considerable amount of time and money in their education. The combination of relatively low starting salaries and high barriers to certification will only discourage the most qualified candidates from pursuing teaching positions. Increasing the availability of alternative routes, and making them known to students with high academic ability, would conceivably attract greater levels of highly qualified teaching candidates.

States and districts can also implement various additional initiatives to attract candidates to public school teaching positions. For example, the use of financial incentives to supplement the uniform salary scale, these incentives include: federal student loan forgiveness, scholarships, waiving of licensing fees, housing assistance, and signing bonuses (Paige and Esposito, 2004). However, these initiatives are widely underexploited; only 24 states offer some form of assistance, 18 target aid to attract qualified teachers to high need areas, and 7 target aid toward filling positions in high poverty area schools (Quality Counts, 2003). In addition, only 5 states offer signing bonuses. If more states were to take advantage of implementing these financial resources, public schools would be able to fill critical job needs with academically qualified teachers. I put forth that the federal government must encourage and incentivize states' use of financial incentives to attract qualified teachers to critical job needs.

One may argue that these high standards are impractical and an improper allocation of resources. However, given the stated importance of early childhood education in overall educational outcomes, it is clear that we need higher requirements for teachers here. Even more, it is logical to presume that the classrooms with the highest demonstrated need should receive the most attention from dedicated and qualified supports. Furthermore, these measures will not

require additional spending, these policy implications simply suggest that states should reallocate preexisting resources to focus on attracting highly qualified and culturally sensitive candidates to migrant early childhood education. States should particularly concentrate on allocating funds to high-need school districts. Teachers who work in more affluent districts enjoy higher salaries, smaller-class sizes, newer and better materials, and greater influence over school decisions (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Therefore teachers prefer to work in schools with large concentrations of relatively high-income, low-minority, high-achieving students with fewer disciplinary problems and more parental support (Betts et. al. 2000 as referenced by Paige and Esposito). School districts that lack these competitive advantages are forced to compromise their own policies governing teacher quality (Paige and Esposito). It is essential for the state to distribute higher levels of incentivizing funds to these school districts so that high need students are not left in the hands of unqualified teachers, and subsequently condemned to fail.

Bilingual Migrant Early Childhood Education Initiatives

One potential weakness, identified by Mathur and Parameswaran, of the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs is the fact that they often do not have adequate resources to attract sufficient bilingual and culturally sensitive teachers. In addition to ensuring that we attract the most highly qualified bilingual candidates to Early Childhood Education, we must ensure that we have established an overall structure that balances continued Spanish language development and English language exposure.

Mathur and Parameswaran advocate for, a sociocultural approach to school readiness that “implies that efforts to facilitate intellectual development must take into account variance in the cultural backgrounds and, above all, the language systems of the cultures to which children are

first exposed”. Upon elaboration of a previous study, they claim that if children are compelled to learn a new linguistic code that is not integrated in the culture in which they were raised; their cognitive development may be impaired (3). It would subsequently have a great, positive effect on migrant students school readiness if Early Childhood Educational initiatives were to be bilingual.

In addition, Barnett claims that teachers in preschool programs should receive intensive supervision and coaching; they should be involved in a continuous improvement process for teaching and learning. This finding provides support for my earlier claim that highly qualified teachers should be targeted to critical need vacancies. He additionally makes the normative argument that preschool programs should regularly assess children’s learning and development to monitor goal accomplishment. Moreover, Barnett puts forth that, because an earlier start and longer duration appear to produce better results, policies that expand access to children under 4 should prioritize disadvantaged children who are likely to benefit most. If the federal government were to universalize access to [bilingual] preschool, there would be marked progress in terms of the educational attainment of migrant students. Therefore, better early childhood education could serve as the best tool to increase overall migrant high school graduation and dropout rates.

Summer/After-School Enrichment-Based Programming

As noted earlier, 25% of migrant families fall below the federal poverty line. A consequence of this lower socioeconomic status is that many migrant farmworkers’ children experience an achievement gap with their peers, which widens each summer. The United States needs to incentivize after-school and summer enrichment-based programming that will help mitigate the deteriorating effects of the summer-slide in migrant students. This type of programming will be even more influential among migrant students if they can serve as a viable

alternative to working in agricultural fields during the summer. If these programs are implemented at an early age, migrant students will be able to realistically achieve at increasingly higher levels over time. Research indicates that, long-term, these programs will be able to inspire migrant students and give them the necessary tools to pursue whichever life they value.

The National Education Association has firmly endorsed the positive and mitigating impacts of extended learning opportunities (ELOs). They identify ELOs as a broad range of programs that provide children with academic enrichment beyond the traditional school day or academic year (National Education Association). Evidence shows that when school-age children and teens do not have access to such programs and are left unsupervised after school, they are more inclined to receive poor grades and drop out of school (National Education Association). Moreover, studies suggest that regular participation in programs that provide access to academic and social activities foster a child's academic and social development; positive contributions can be seen in students' grades, academic achievement and self-esteem (National Education Association). These programs even go beyond reducing summer learning loss to increase academic achievement for children in poverty.

Academic consensus shows that the most effective ELOs combine academic enrichment, cultural activities, and recreational opportunities to engage youth and guide learning (National Education Association). By complimenting rather than duplicating schoolwork, these programs are able to provide educationally enriching activities to children negatively impacted by the achievement gap. The No Child Left Behind Act offers several avenues that can be used to fund extended learning opportunities (National Education Association). However, many of these funding streams have since dried up and it is increasingly difficult to obtain support for ELOs. I purport that the federal government mandate that a specific portion (depending on the size of the

migrant population in the state) of the funds allocated by the MEP must go to providing after-school and summer programming precisely tailored for this subpopulation. Summer and after-school programming should also be financially incentivized for migrant students who feel the need to work during the summer to supplement their family income. The availability of extended learning opportunities is crucial for a migrant students' overall educational trajectory.

Educational enrichment outside of school is particularly essential for students belonging to minority and low-income social groups.

VI. Conclusions

The contemporary state of migrant students' education in the United States is inexcusable. While considerable portions of federal funds already focus on migrant education, current available programming is inefficient and ineffective at combating the precise barriers migrant students face to academic success. The best opportunity to increase high school graduation rates among this subpopulation is the effective implementation of well-structured early childhood education programs. The federal government has political, ethical, moral, and utilitarian obligations to provide extra supports to migrant students. It must play a more robust role in states' allocation of federal funds and in constructing migrant student curricula. Local control of curriculum unduly burdens transitory migrant students. Having to adapt to a new curriculum with each move puts even the brightest migrant student in danger of failing (Wiseman, 51) Moreover, the federal government should incentivize the use of financial gifts, along with lowering barriers to teaching certification, by the state to attract highly qualified teachers to critical job vacancies. The U.S. government should also compel states to allocate a designated portion of their federal migrant education funds to cultural sensitivity training for

teachers and after-school and summer programs, precisely designed to fit the needs of migrant students. If the federal government does not restructure and reconceptualize its current efforts to support migrant students, this population will be markedly less capable of pursuing a life they value.

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