

# youthwork INFORMATION BRIEF



No. 9

## Migrant Youth

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2005

LearningWork Connection

An initiative of the John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy in partnership with the Center for Learning Excellence and the Center on Education and Training for Employment at The Ohio State University.

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The New Strategic Vision for the Delivery of Youth Services under the Workforce Development Act, Training and Guidance Letter 3-04, focuses on “the most at-risk and neediest youth.” Among those are migrant youth, defined in 20CFR669.670 as “disadvantaged youth, ages 14 through 21, who are individually eligible or are members of eligible families under the WIA section 167 NFJP.” Eligible individuals include those “who, for 12 consecutive months out of the 24 months prior to the application for the program involved [have] been primarily employed in agricultural labor that is characterized by chronic unemployment and underemployment; and a dependent of the person described.”

### The Needs of Migrant Youth

Migrant youth often have limited English-speaking abilities; about 85% of migrants are Hispanic. Migrant work schedules lead to frequent moves and often to interruptions in education. Cultural differences may also place higher priority on the needs of the family than on the needs of the individual youth. Because there is no tracking system for migrant youth, there are no hard statistics regarding their numbers, dropout rate, health problems, or other issues. However, workforce development professionals working with migrant youth believe that those numbers are significant.

#### Migrant Youth Issues

- Poor or irregular school attendance
  - High dropout rate (estimated to be 50%) and low graduation rate
  - Low basic skills
  - Low expectations regarding education
  - Lack of time for assignments
  - Insufficient information about career and academic possibilities and opportunities
  - Pressure to drop out from family and peers
  - Slow progress through school
  - Lack of parental support and involvement in education
- Mobility
  - Lack of continuity of curriculum
  - Different standards from state to state
  - Mid-year entrance into classes
  - Difficulty of getting records

### **Migrant Youth Issues (continued)**

- Social and cultural isolation
  - Low self-esteem
  - Lack of exposure to other role models
  - Lack of adult supervision of emancipated minors
  - Inability to participate in extracurricular activities
  - Family responsibilities (e.g., early parenthood, child care, contact with non-migrant society, contribution to family income)
  - Racial and ethnic prejudice
  - Limited or non-English speaking (about 25%)
- Poverty
  - Limited medical care
  - Poor nutrition

### **Cultural Values**

- The family is more important than the individual.
- The needs of the family (e.g., income, child care) take precedence over those of the individual
- Families take pride in independence and self-sufficiency.
- Parents make ultimate decisions.
- Elders are held in respect.

### **Migrant Youth Education**

Youth services staff under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) are not alone in serving migrant youth. In particular, migrant youth education programs are a critical partner in meeting the educational needs of migrant youth.

### **Migrant Youth Education Programs**

- Increased importance as mechanized harvesting decreases the need for unskilled labor
- Federally funded to facilitate interstate coordination of services
- Meets complex needs and improves educational opportunities of migrant youth
- Priority given to youth with the highest risk of academic failure
- Eligibility requirement: migratory move within the past three years for independent migrant youth workers or members of migrant families
- Can tap into other funding sources (Title I, bilingual education, special education)
- Provides related services
  - Identification and recruitment
  - Needs assessment
  - Transfer of records and credits
  - Compensatory services for interruptions in schooling
  - Counseling to overcome social isolation
  - Coordination with other programs

### **Migrant Youth Education Programs (continued)**

- Can help address local education program issues
  - No school plan for dealing with migrant youth
  - Students discouraged from enrolling
  - Inappropriate placement

### **Strategies for WIA Youth Services Staff**

WIA youth services staff can use two sets of strategies to meet the needs of migrant youth. One set of strategies focuses on details of program operation and activities, while another set focuses on establishing and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships with migrant youth and the migrant community.

### **Strategies for Working with Migrant Youth**

#### **Program Strategies**

- Recruit through agencies serving migrant youth.
  - Visit migrant camps
  - Contact churches
  - Contact state and local migrant education program staff
  - Contact community-based organizations, farmers' alliances
  - Involve 4-H and Extension
- Provide Spanish-speaking staff.
- Offer alternative scheduling for youth activities.
- Provide workshops related to employment and postsecondary options.
- Provide extra academic counseling.
  - Be sure that all necessary courses are completed.
  - Offer summer school and supplemental courses.
  - Offer computer access.
  - Encourage involvement in school activities and clubs.
- Refer students to English as a Second Language (ESL), General Educational Development (GED), Adult Basic Education (ABE), family literacy programs.
- Provide support services such as transportation, child care, referral to social service agencies
- Coordinate services across local areas as youth move.

#### **Interpersonal Strategies**

- Meet with parents and elders; encourage parent involvement.
- Present services as partnership – not charity.
- Personalize contact.
- Create a sense of belonging and develop supportive relationships.
  - Include Hispanic artifacts on walls.
  - Post pictures of and letters from previous migrant participants.
  - Help migrants connect with nonmigrant youth.
  - Encourage youth relationships with mentors, tutors, and advocates.
- Strengthen home and community ties.
  - Help youth be positive about their identity.
  - Establish a migrant youth association.
- Maintain high expectations for youth participation and outcomes.

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**Youthwork Information Briefs** are sponsored by Ohio Department of Job and Family Services - ODJFS, Office of Workforce Development, Bureau of Workforce Services.

