

Testimony of Carmen Medina

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Before the United States Senate
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions

April 29, 2010

Good morning Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi, and distinguished members of the Committee. I am Carmen Medina, Chief of the Division of Student Services and Migrant Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education. I want to thank you for the invitation to speak to you today about the Migrant Education Program and the importance of this program to migrant children and their families in Pennsylvania and across the nation.

The federal Migrant Education Program supports the goal of ensuring that every child in America receives a world – class education that prepares them for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment. I welcome this opportunity to share with you the experience of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and my thoughts on why the support for the Migrant Education Program should be continued through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as outlined in the President’s Blueprint for ESEA Reauthorization.

Let me start by calling your attention to an analysis of the ESEA Blueprint recently released by the Interstate Migrant Education Council or IMEC, which is attached to my written testimony. This analysis, in which I took part, highlights aspects of the proposed ESEA reauthorization which are of particular benefit to migrant children and their families. The analysis also makes recommendations to strengthen several sections of the blueprint that pertain directly to migrant children, such as expanding eligibility for program services to children from birth to age 21 and better defining certain key terms related to migrant children.

The expansion of eligibility to include children from birth to age 3 is particularly important. We know that early intervention services can have a profound positive impact on children at high risk of academic failure. Including these children in the Migrant Education Program will enable states to offer these services to the youngest migrant children. Pennsylvania has been using state resources to fund these important services to very young children and we are seeing the benefit of serving these children during these vital developmental years.

Migrant workers are defined as those individuals who travel from place to place to find temporary work in such industries as agriculture, dairy farming, fishing and food processing. The average migrant family moves three to five times annually. Such mobility is particularly difficult on the children of migrant families and detrimental to their educational achievement. Mobility as a risk factor for academic achievement is combined with the fact that many migrant children are not native English speakers and need instruction in English as a second language. Evidence shows that migrant children are usually three to five years behind non-migrant students in grade level and are at an increased risk of dropping out of school. The Migrant Education Program was established in 1966 as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to address the unique needs of these children and operates in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

The Migrant Education Program makes federal funds available to states to provide educational and support services to migrant children, youth and their families. The services offered through the Migrant Education Program are intended to help reduce the impact on the educational achievement of migrant children caused by their mobility, language and other barriers. In Pennsylvania, we provide the following types of services to migrant children and

their families:

- Extended learning time, both during the school day and outside of school hours;
- In-home support services;
- Language instruction and cultural support;
- Out-of-school youth programs and dropout re-engagement;
- High quality pre-school instruction;
- Student leadership programs;
- Post-secondary enrollment support; and
- Activities to engage parents in the education of their children.

Migrant students are identified and recruited to the Migrant Education Program based on several eligibility criteria. Currently, to be eligible for the program in Pennsylvania, the child or youth must:

- Be between the ages of three and 21 years old and not graduated from high school or hold a high school equivalency certificate;
- Be a migrant worker or have a parent, spouse, or guardian who is a migrant worker;
- Have moved within the preceding 36 months in order to obtain or seek employment or accompany a parent, spouse, or guardian in obtaining or seeking temporary or seasonal employment in qualifying work; and
- Have moved from one school district to another.

Each year, Pennsylvania provides migrant education services in 139 Pennsylvania school districts and 46 counties across the state of Pennsylvania. In the 2008-2009 program year, Pennsylvania's Migrant Education Program served a total of 5,409 eligible children and youth. This included migrant children and youth of Hispanic, Asian, African American and Caucasian descent across grade and age levels. Eighty two percent of these children were not fluent in English. Nineteen percent were preschool children, 55 percent were in kindergarten to grade 12, and 26 percent were out-of-school youth.

Pennsylvania operates the program by dividing the state into nine project areas for the purpose of program implementation and management. Each project area is overseen by a Project Manager who directs program implementation and day-to-day operations. Each Project Manager reports regularly to the Chief of the Division of Student Services and Migrant Education in the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The Pennsylvania Department of Education also provides technical assistance and professional development services to all project areas. Project area staff handle program implementation, including student support services, data collection and analysis, and recruitment of eligible children and youth.

Identification and outreach to eligible children is an important part of the program. Migrant families are likely to be unaware of services and resources that may be available, in part because of the very mobility and language barriers that make the services provided by the program so important to them and their children. The Migrant Education Program in Pennsylvania works hard to ensure that migrant students and their families are aware and take advantage of this

important resource. Recruiters in Pennsylvania locate children through referrals from growers, industry owners and employees, other migrant families and local school districts. Once a migrant family is identified, recruiters interview family members to determine if the children are eligible for migrant education services. Recruiters also help migrant families find other services for which they may be eligible.

The Migrant Education Program has been an essential part of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's strategy to ensure that all students receive the necessary support to be successful in school and beyond by taking a holistic approach to student assistance. The program allows us to begin offering individualized services to migrant children when they are very young and continue these services through high school graduation. The program engages parents and fosters collaboration between families and school districts and community organizations to offer a wide-range of high quality programming both during school hours and non-school hours.

Our Migrant Education Program summer activities are particularly important to migrant families. Many migrant families arrive in a new area at the beginning of the summer; our summer programs offer them their first point of contact to educational services and assistance in their new community. Migrant children are able to receive English as a Second Language (ESL) education during the summer. ESL and other instruction is essential to preventing the "summer backslide" during which English language learners and children from low income households can lose up to three months growth in reading.

The Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program is also a key source of valuable data that informs state and local policies. The program has an evaluation system in place that measures each student's needs and progress throughout the student's participation in the program. The system collects quantitative and qualitative summer and school-year program data that is vital to identifying the needs of each child and creating an individualized service delivery plan. In addition, migrant education staff has access to student assessments at the district level and can work with migrant students' teachers and parents to ensure the educational, social and emotional needs of each child are met.

The success of the Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program is evident on many levels. Pre- and post-service delivery evaluations of the program show that with each year of participation, migrant students improve their academic performance in all categories on the Pennsylvania state academic assessment in **both** reading and math. We also have a strong track record of keeping migrant students in school. In Pennsylvania, 88% of the migrant students in their senior year in high school who are participants in the program graduated and over 90% of those students continued with post-secondary education.

We are proud to say that Pennsylvania is a leader in delivering services through the Migrant Education Program to its migrant children and families. For many years, Pennsylvania has provided consulting and guidance on the delivery of migrant education services to other states and the Office of Migrant Education at the United States Department of Education often refers other states to Pennsylvania for assistance in developing and enhancing their Migrant Education Programs.

The program's success in Pennsylvania is also evident on a personal level. I would like to close by sharing with you a quote from a migrant student from Cambodia who participated in the program for three years. This student graduated from high school last year and is now continuing his education at Penn State University.

“When I first arrived in Philadelphia, I was completely clueless. I didn't even know how to find my way home from school . . . Everything was different from where I came from . . . For awhile, I just stayed in my house and my computer became my best friend. I was scared and hiding and I didn't even think I would ever get a good job after high school. I was sad and frustrated.

But along came the PA Migrant Education Program and my life changed . . . I was amazed at how many people had the same background as I did. Once in the program I got to see many beautiful places and made many college and career visits. So many nice people have helped me with so many of my problems. Without the PA Migrant Education Program, I would not have the courage to stand and talk about my challenging life.”

Through the Migrant Education Program, states are able to reach many students and help them to overcome the significant barriers that stand between them and educational and economic success. Please help us continue to do this great work by continuing the support of the Migrant Education Program in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and considering the specific suggestions set forth in the IMEC report.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.