

Seasonal Farmworkers Children Study

Budget Language

\$183,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 is provided solely for the office of the superintendent of public instruction to collaborate with the department of agriculture and the department of labor and industries on a study that, at a minimum, examines factors that impact children of seasonal farmworkers in comparison to migratory students in the following areas: School and program access, school readiness, attendance, grade promotion and retention, performance on state assessments, academic growth, graduation rates, discipline rates, and teacher qualifications and years of experience. The study must also investigate student access to postsecondary education and career opportunities in formerly rural or agricultural communities and provide a suggested definition of children of seasonal farmworker family.

Proviso Purpose

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) was charged with examining the factors affecting opportunities for children of seasonal farmworkers, conducted in partnership with the Washington Department of Agriculture and Department of Labor & Industries. ESSB 5950 called for an examination of the following areas: school and program access, school readiness, attendance, grade promotion and retention, performance on state assessments, academic growth, graduation rates, discipline rates, teacher qualifications and years of experience, and access to post-secondary education and career opportunities in formerly rural or agricultural communities. Due to limitations in identifying seasonal farmworker children within these data sets, the study focused on school access, academic performance, and post-secondary opportunities. While children of migratory agricultural workers and fishers qualify for supplemental academic and support services through the federally funded Title I Part C Migrant Education Program, there is a concern that children of non-migratory seasonal farmworkers lack access to similar resources, despite having comparable lived experiences as migratory students.

Services Provided

A study was conducted examining the factors affecting educational opportunities for children of seasonal farmworkers, resulting in this report. The study focused on the needs of children of non-migratory seasonal farmworkers and the type of access to similar resources children of migratory agricultural workers receive through the federally funded Title I Part C Migrant Education Program (MEP).

Specifically, funding from this proviso was used to procure a vendor experienced in community engagement, working with underserved populations and collecting, disaggregating, and analyzing student data in a variety of methods. Through a competitive bidding process, Koné Consulting was selected to perform this study.



Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from stakeholders and community representatives to understand the unique educational needs of seasonal farmworker families. The resulting report presented experiences of formerly migratory students whose families still conduct agricultural work, but lost program eligibility after settling permanently in local communities and provided recommendations to enhance educational outcomes for children of seasonal farmworkers.

Criteria for Receiving Services/Grants

No grants were provided for this funding. The funding was used to contract a vendor to conduct the study.

Beneficiaries in the 2024-25 School Year

Number of School Districts:	0
Number of Schools:	0
Number of Students:	0
Number of Educators:	0

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No.

State Funding History

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2025	\$183,000	\$159,834

Number of Beneficiaries Per Fiscal Year (e.g. School Districts, Schools, Students, Educators, Other)

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2025	N/A

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

The legislature did not provide ongoing funding for this work. Beginning July 1, 2025, the funding for this contract ended and OSPI no longer implements this contract.

Program Evaluation or Major Findings

One requirement of the proviso was to create a definition of a child of a seasonal farmworker. Based on the data compiled from the interviews, focus groups, survey results, and advisory committee, a proposed *state* definition was developed for consideration by Washington's lawmakers.

A "Child of a Seasonal Farmworker" is a person who is 21 years of age or younger, eligible for free public education, and is the dependent of at least one parent, guardian, or spouse whose principal employment is in non-farm owning agricultural work for at least part of the year or independently conducts seasonal or temporary agricultural work.

Major Findings

Study findings from interviews, surveys, and focus groups reveal critical gaps in supporting seasonal farmworker students across three interconnected levels: system level, operational challenges, and student level.

System level, the changing nature of farmwork shows families increasingly settling in communities rather than migrating, yet the only funding resource for seasonal farmworkers is focused on the migratory seasonal farmworker, which does not reflect the shift in migration patterns.

Operational challenges center on insufficient academic support services, including tutoring and classroom assistance, coupled with a critical need for additional classroom support staff to help students succeed. Equally important is the need for cultural competency training among educators to develop a deeper understanding of seasonal farmworker family lifestyles and how these circumstances impact classroom engagement. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen communication channels with parents and improve advocacy efforts for students. This includes raising awareness about available services and building trusting relationships between farmworker families and graduation specialists, school administration, and student advocates to create a more supportive educational environment.

Student level, children of seasonal farmworkers need comprehensive support to overcome educational barriers. Essential needs include dual language programming for bilingual learners, expanded career exploration programs, tutoring services, and transportation access for enrichment activities. Students also need improved mental health support and healthcare access, particularly as farmworker communities face increased targeting and stress. Additional needs include financial aid guidance, enhanced technology support, and addressing housing instability that affects educational continuity.

These findings highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that recognizes the evolving nature of seasonal farmwork, expands program eligibility, and addresses the interconnected academic, social, and economic challenges facing these students and their families.

Major Challenges Faced by Program

In addition to the study barriers noted above, the major challenges facing the study results were an inability to identify a total count of children of seasonal farmworker families due to limited data gathered by state agencies around the number of children whose family conduct seasonal

agricultural activities as well as concerns around current immigration actions impacting family willingness to participate in the study.

Study Barriers

Limitations and Considerations

Bias - Possible sources of bias in this study include the collection of sample data that may not accurately represent the entire group (sampling bias), the tendency for people to report inaccurate answers to self-reported questions (response bias), and the systematic tendency of study participants to remember and report information differently based on their outcome status or exposure (recall bias). The study design mitigated these possible sources of bias by triangulating data from interviews, on-line surveys, and hosted focus groups to identify the strongest themes.

Limitations – This study was designed as a sample-size study rather than a full-scale, statewide assessment. As such, while the findings offer valuable insights into the needs of children from seasonal farmworker families, they may not fully represent the experiences of all districts across Washington state. In particular, additional work may be needed to accurately estimate the percentage of seasonal farmworker students enrolled in each district to inform potential funding models. Furthermore, data collection efforts were primarily concentrated in Northwest and Eastern Washington, which may limit the geographic generalizability of the findings.

Current Political Landscape – The current national political environment related to immigration enforcement and the recent experiences and needs of seasonal farmworker families who are immigrants or refugees from other countries impacted this study. As federal immigration policies have become increasingly restrictive, it has created a climate of uncertainty and fear within the communities of seasonal farmworkers. Policy shifts, enforcement measures, and anti-immigrant rhetoric created heightened stress and fear for families. That fear impacted the willingness of some families to participate in the in-person focus groups for this study, so accommodations were made for their participation virtually. The study revealed that the current environment has also impacted the willingness of some seasonal farmworker families to access and apply for educational services for their children.

Student Population Estimates – When asked to estimate the number of children of seasonal farmworkers in their schools who did not qualify for MEP services during the past school year, responses varied significantly.

Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents reported not knowing this number, and 58% indicated having at least one seasonal farmworker (non-migratory) student in their schools. The distribution of responses shows 26% serving 1–50 students, with smaller percentages serving larger populations: 8% each serving 51–100, 101–250, 251–500, and over five hundred students, respectively. Notably, three respondents (8%) reported serving more than five hundred seasonal

farmworker (non-migratory) students, highlighting the substantial number of children of seasonal farmworkers who fall outside MEP eligibility requirements.

Future Opportunities

This body of work has been discontinued by the legislature. Future opportunities will depend on future legislative direction and resources dedicated to the work. If this work were to be continued, future work should consider the following points:

- Conduct additional population-level research on seasonal farmworker students across the state. For example, the study did not include recent sub-state data on the total number of seasonal farmworkers (settled, shuttlers, and migratory) doing farmwork, or the total number of students of seasonal farmworkers (migratory and non-migratory) enrolled in Washington public schools. Data could be collected to identify the percentage of seasonal farmworker students enrolled in school districts across the state, which could inform potential funding models.
- Causes of attendance problems with students of seasonal farmworkers, the comparative frequency of absences for students of settled, shuttler, and migratory farmworkers, comparative data on dropout rates between MEP students and non-MEP children of seasonal farmworkers, as well as disproportionate discipline rates and attendance rates for these groups. Overall, this study demonstrates the evolving nature of seasonal agricultural work across Washington.

Other Relevant Information

Acknowledgments

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and Koné Consulting would like to thank and acknowledge the stakeholders who participated in the interviews and survey for sharing their perspectives on the needs and educational experiences of seasonal farmworker students. We also deeply appreciate the seasonal farmworker families we met with and who participated in a focus group for being open to meeting with us and sharing their experiences. Their participation and lived experience were vital to the development of this report. We are also grateful for the organizations that helped us connect with seasonal farmworker families in the community, including the Quincy School District, Community to Community — Mount Vernon, Burlington School District, Educational Service District 123 — Pasco, and EPIC Early Learning — Bridgeport.

We would also like to thank our advisory group members for their time and the guidance they provided throughout this process.

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

[Click here to see a list of all OSPI grant recipients in the 2025 Fiscal Year.](#)

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