

FROM THE GROUND UP

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Focus on Migrant Students

AIM Retreat Encourages Young Leaders

by Ramiro Arceo

Nineteen migrant students from seven counties in North Carolina are taking leadership by beginning Action, Inspiration, Motivation (AIM) clubs at their schools. These students participated in SAF's AIM Leadership Retreat held at Camp Oak Hill in Oxford, NC, the weekend of October 27-29. The retreat focused on building the students' leadership abilities and encouraged them to support one another in school for the betterment of themselves, their schools and their communities. The students made commitments to learn as much as they could over the intense two-day period so they could return to their schools and create an AIM Club.

The activities at the retreat included workshops about dispute and conflict resolution, youth empowerment and starting AIM Clubs. A recruiter from the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia, spoke to the students about CAMP and how to apply to college. All activities were aimed at motivating students to become peer leaders at their schools and to take action to improve their education.

Starting an AIM Club involves students recruiting members and selecting activities for the club's first year. Activities are intended to enhance students' educational experiences and might include: taking field trips to area colleges, participating in art and theater events and organizing community service events.

SAF staff and school advisors will participate actively in the development of these clubs. By the end of the academic year, each club will be self-sustainable and able to provide assistance to other counties that wish to start AIM Clubs.



Students at the AIM Retreat in Oxford, NC

Photo by: Ramiro Arceo

Facts about Migrant Children

- Of farmworker parents (both foreign-born and US-born workers), 50% are accompanied by their children as they migrate.¹
- In 1994, a study showed that 60% of migrant students drop out of school (down from 90% in the 1970s).²
- By the time a migrant child is 12, he/she may be working in the fields between 16-18 hours per week.²
- The average migrant child may attend 3 different schools in one year. For many children it takes roughly 3 years to advance one grade level.³

Sources: 1 ERIC; http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed423097.html; 2 David Bell, "The Nation's Invisible Families Living in the Stream," MEMO; 3 National Center for Farmworker Health

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Bright, Growing Future Expected for CAMP Nationwide

by Alison Blaine, from interviews with Marcos Sánchez and Rocio Cárdenas

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) was founded in 1972 with the mission to help students whose parents are migrant and seasonal farmworkers enroll into and graduate from a college or university. The first CAMP location was established at St. Edwards' University in Austin, Texas, but has since expanded nationwide. In the past year, three new CAMP locations were established in California, along with one in each of five other states: Texas, Oregon, Wisconsin, Michigan and Washington.

Marcos Sánchez, Director of CAMP at California State University, Sacramento, is excited about what the new programs reflect about the future of CAMP. "I feel very positive about our future," Sánchez relates.

For the past three years, Sánchez has been part of the leadership in developing a strategy to strengthen his program and receive additional funding from Congress for new CAMP locations across the country. The establishment of new CAMP locations in California and elsewhere provides Sánchez and other CAMP directors and staff with every incentive to continue their efforts.

Rocio Cárdenas, a former CAMP student at CSU Sacramento, now serves as Director of the only CAMP location in the southeastern United States, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, GA. As CAMP locations are being established in other parts of the country, Cárdenas is very optimistic about the future of her program and the funding of new CAMP locations in the southeast. She affirms, "The increasing migrant population in the southeastern part of the United States will eventually cause the creation of other CAMP programs in the southeast....The creation of other programs in the nation gives us the guarantee that we will continue to receive funding from the government and that the migrant population will be noticed."

The progress and expansion of CAMP nationwide can be attributed to directors and staff like Sánchez and Cárdenas who are committed to extending the opportunity of higher education to all migrant students. Of course, much credit must also be given to the students themselves, who overcome major obstacles in attaining the academics necessary for better and brighter futures.

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NC Migrant Educators Seek to Involve Parents

by Alison Blaine, from interviews with Maureen Anderson, Denise Beane and Roxanne Taylor

Maureen Anderson, Denise Beane and Roxanne Taylor are three NC migrant educators who recognize the importance of active parent involvement in childhood education. In families with migratory lifestyles, however, there are a number of obstacles that may severely limit or prevent parents from getting involved in their children's education.

Anderson, the Migrant Education Coordinator of Buncombe County Schools since 1996, cites language and cultural barriers as two major problems discouraging active migrant parent involvement in schools. Contributing significantly to the problem of the language barrier, she adds, is the scarcity of Spanish-speaking personnel at the school level. Lack of transportation and lengthy work schedules are also common factors that "make it difficult for parents to attend [school] events even at night or on the weekends."

Beane, a migrant educator since 1986 and Taylor, a tutor/recruiter/interpreter for the past seven years, both serve the Randolph County School District. Beane's strategy for involving parents is to "first get to know the parents and show them you care." She adds, "I'll never forget what I learned in one workshop I attended, 'Parents don't care WHAT you know, until they know that you CARE.'"

In efforts to curb the difficulties of the language barrier, Taylor tries to make herself available to migrant families as a liaison between home and school. "Many families have my phone number and call me to help with things received from the school that they do not understand...Many parents attend functions at the schools if they know that I will be there to interpret for them."

Like Beane and Taylor, Anderson stresses the importance of the migrant educator's role in establishing caring, personal contact with parents. She affirms, "Once parents enjoy a good experience that is non-threatening and inviting, they can't wait to come back and usually bring friends!"

Anderson, Beane and Taylor are very dedicated migrant educators who acknowledge the responsibility of the school system in working with migrating families to help facilitate parent involvement in schools. Anderson sums it up by saying, "the school system must make every effort to reach out to every parent who wants to be involved. Of course, the parents must make some effort also. But shutting out parents who want to help their children solely because of the language barrier is unacceptable and illegal!"



Photo by: Maureen Anderson

Children from the Buncombe County Schools Migrant Summer Camp on a field trip in the Pisgah National Forest, North Carolina

Online Resources for Migrant Educators

- ◆ Educational Resource Information Center
<http://www.ael.org/eric>
- ◆ ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education
<http://www.ericsp.org>
- ◆ ESCORT Migrant Education
<http://www.oneonta.edu/~thomasrl/>
- ◆ National Office of Migrant Education
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/MEP/>

