



Center for Worker Health

Wake Forest School of Medicine

POLICY BRIEF

Latinx Child Farmworkers in North Carolina: Educational Experiences

Summary

Children as young as 10 years old are hired to work on farms in the United States (US). In North Carolina, these children are most often Latinx. Little information about the educational status and experiences of child farmworkers is available. This policy brief provides information on migrant and seasonal child farmworkers' status and experiences in the US education system.

In this study, Latinx child farmworkers had elevated rates of repeating a grade and dropout status. Some reported disruption to their schooling caused by international, interstate, and intrastate movement. These movements were often related to their status as farmworkers. Students faced barriers to engagement with educational enrichment opportunities and integration into school life. Many schools were ill prepared to accommodate the language needs and migration experience of Latinx farmworker students. Several students reported experiencing racism in school.

Latinx child farmworkers are vulnerable due to structural factors, such as immigration policy and anti-immigrant rhetoric, lax child labor laws, poverty, dangerous work conditions, educational inequities, and the organization of work in the US agricultural system. Additional supportive educational policies are needed. Policies to reduce child employment in agriculture while supporting adult agricultural workers are needed to ensure educational opportunities that promote future health and well-being.

Why does it matter?

An estimated 30,000-79,325 children—some as young as 10 years—are hired to work in US agriculture annually. These children are most often Latinx and experience vulnerabilities that act as barriers to achieving a quality education. Education is a strong predictor of health across populations and has lifelong implications. The status of education for these children is just one more injustice experienced by this vulnerable yet essential population.

What did the researchers do?

In 2016, bilingual researchers completed in-depth interviews with 30 Latinx child farmworkers aged 10 to 17 years working across North Carolina. In 2017, bilingual field interviewers completed structured interviews with 202 Latinx children across North Carolina. In-depth and structured interviews addressed educational experiences and children's educational status.



Photo courtesy of Hunter Ogletree

Research for this policy brief is reported in: Quandt SA, Arnold TJ, Mora DC, Arcury TA, Talton JW, Daniel SS. Hired Latinx Child Farmworkers in North Carolina: Educational Status and Experience Through a Social Justice Lens. *New Solut.* 2021;30(4):282-293. doi: 10.1177/1048291120970207.

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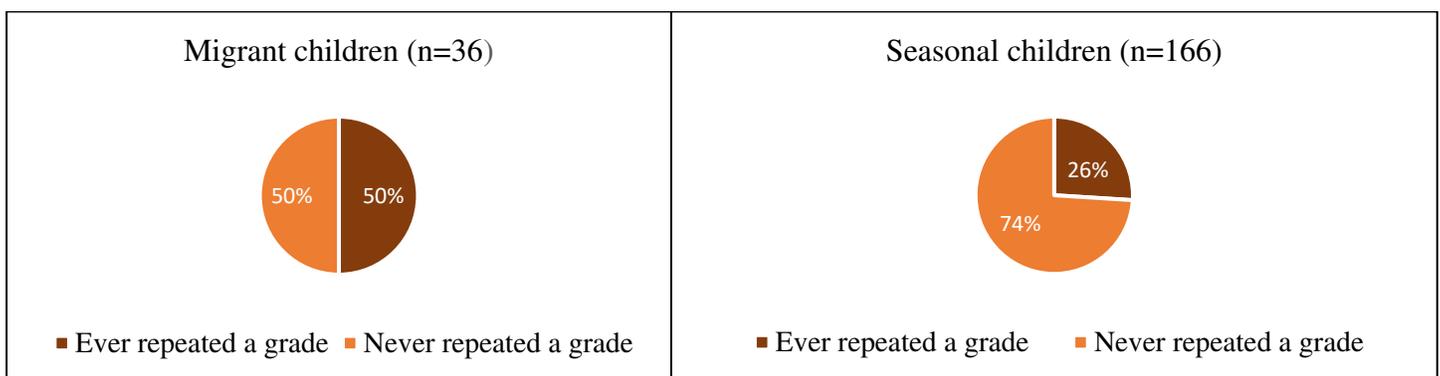
What did the researchers find?

Child Farmworker Experiences in Schools (in-depth interviews, n=30)

- Children had low expectations of school.
"The teachers don't scream at you like in other schools." –10-year-old seasonal girl
"[The teachers say they] do not have time to go one person at a time, so I gotta pay more attention." –16-year-old migrant boy
- Some children experienced racist comments or bullying at school, based on their ethnicity. Children reported instances of both classmates and teachers being the perpetrators of these discriminatory actions.
"There [were] a lot of rednecks in our school who liked to cause trouble with the Hispanics. Whenever they could get one person alone, they would either pick on them, tease them, or even try to fight with them . . . push them into lockers and stuff." –17-year-old seasonal boy
A white teacher told a student: *"Go back to Honduras; we don't need you here in the United States."* –17-year-old seasonal girl
- Migrant children faced more disruptions in school and social life than seasonal child workers
Discussing the experience of migrating mid-school year: *"They're already ahead of you [when you arrive], and you don't even know what you're doing."* –17-year-old migrant boy
"Most of the kids [in North Carolina], their parents didn't do what we did, so they didn't really understand why we would start [in North Carolina and then leave]." –17-year-old migrant boy
- English-language learners reported additional educational barriers due to limited accommodation in rural schools
Describing what it was like when he arrived to the US at the age of seven: *"It was kind of hard at first 'cause I would sit there at my desk and they gave me a dictionary.... All the kids would look at me and kind of make fun of me 'cause I didn't know English. And the teacher would be telling me a lesson.... She would be doing it kind of fast so it was hard for me to look for the words in the dictionary."* –15-year-old seasonal boy

Education quantitative results (structured interviews, n=202)

- 61 (30.2%) had repeated a grade at some time during their education (by comparison, US rate is about 7%).
 - Nearly twice as many migrants (50.0 %) had repeated a grade compared to their seasonal peers (25.9%).



- Compared with their seasonal peers, migrant children were more likely to work during the school year (75% vs. 39.8%) and during other school vacations or holidays (61.1% vs. 15.1%).
- Out of the 95 children aged 16 to 17, 10 (10.5%) reported that they had dropped out of school. US rate is 2-3%.

Recommendations

- Existing educational programs for migrant children should be properly resourced in order to meet the unique educational needs of this population.
- Comprehensive policies, rather than patchwork programs, are needed to reduce child farmworkers' vulnerabilities.
- Policy focused on creating an anti-racist, equitable education system is needed.
- Indirect support (e.g., increased wages and year-round employment for adult farmworkers) could help reduce the need for young children to work in the fields to support their families.

Additional Reading

- Arcury TA, Arnold TJ, Mora DC, et al. "Be careful!" Perceptions of work-safety culture among hired Latinx child farmworkers in North Carolina. *Am J Ind Med.* 2019;62:1091–1102.
- Quandt SA, Arnold TJ, Mora DC, et al. Hired Latinx child farm labor in North Carolina: The demand-support-control model applied to a vulnerable worker population. *Am J Ind Med.* 2019;62:1079–1090.