



Migrant Education Initiative

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Executive Summary

The Migrant Education Initiative (MEI) is working with the Van Buren Intermediate School District (VBISD) to create an initiative to improve outreach efforts to underserved communities and increase the number of migrant students at the University of Michigan. The VBISD is located in Van Buren county, an area with one of the largest migrant populations in the state of Michigan- it's the largest migrant-serving program in the state. Over the summer, we conducted an in-depth needs-based assessment by organizing four focus groups and surveying over 60 parents and high school students. Through the research phase, MEI revealed several misconceptions about the migrant community; First, though most of these parents did not attend college, they were eager for their children to achieve at least a bachelor degree. Second, the schools in which the students were attending tended to cover college admissions information well enough. With a lack of representation of both migrant and Latinx student populations at the University of Michigan, MEI will assist in bringing these hopeful students to our four-year university. With our recent partnership with VBISD, we hope to bring this group of students to the University of Michigan over the summer, and launch an application incentive program to get these students the best chance of achieving their goals.

Problem Statement

The issue we are tackling is the lack of migrant students enrolling in four-year universities. More specifically, migrant students interested in four-year institutions who are not able to find the appropriate resources needed to apply or learn more about them due to a number of factors; first-generation status, socioeconomic class, location, etc. "Rural schools are characterized by lower expenditure per pupil and a greater concentration of poor students."¹ In Van Buren County, MI, the specific county in which our research was conducted, 28.3% of adults hold a college degree as opposed to 60.2% in Washtenaw County². Students from migrant and seasonal farmworker (MSFW) backgrounds occupy these rural spaces, however most parts of their identity further widen the academic achievement gap. At the University of Michigan, many pipelines exist for local students. However, after completing our summer research phase, we have found that no programs exist for migrant students, or students from rural areas. All of this is to say that these students face issues that they mostly likely don't even know they have—lack of exposure and information— due to these institutional factors that don't allow them to imagine a world outside of these small towns, and therefore miss out on the accompanying opportunities to make it happen.

Research Methods

The research methods we used in our summer research included surveys, focus groups, informative interviews, benchmarking, and a literary analysis. Our summer plan was split into two phases, the first focusing on institutional resources, and the second focusing on the migrant-seasonal working community.

- 1. Surveys:** 32 parents and 32 students were surveyed; the purpose of our surveys were to to better understand the obstacles that migrant communities encounter. The parent survey consisted of 30 questions while the student survey consisted of 28 questions.
- 2. Focus Groups:** Focus groups were conducted with two groups of parents and two groups of students. These focus groups revealed the experiences and problems migrant students had in terms of how Michigan aids migrant students, and how students received information about universities.
- 3. Informational Interviews:** We talked with many campus resources in areas such as the Ginsberg Center, OAMI, CEAL, and CAMP program advisors at Western Michigan University. Through these interviews, we were able to familiarize ourselves with existing information related to recruitment of undocumented students, migrant students, and rural communities.

Data Analysis

Figure 1
Students' Plans after High School

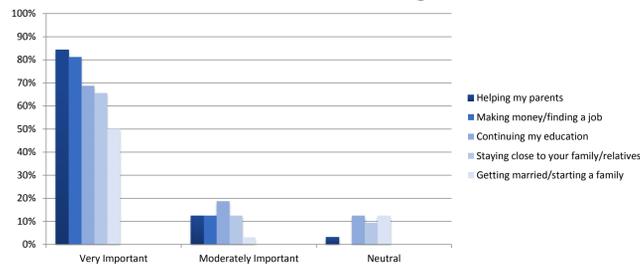


Figure 1: Every 4 out of 5 migrant students said that "helping their parents" was the most important action after high school. The decision between higher education and contributing to one's family presents a dilemma for these students.

Figure 2
Parents' Hopes for their Children after High School

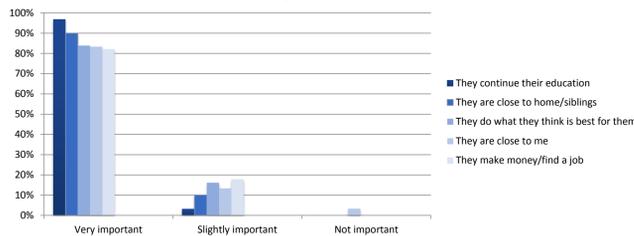


Figure 2: Contrary to popular belief about migrant communities, parents consider education a high priority, with 98% of respondents saying that continuing education is very important.

Figure 3

What part of the application process do you think requires more clarification?

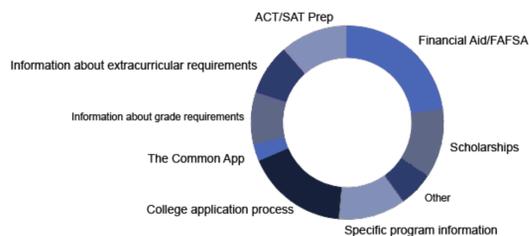


Figure 3: Learning more about Financial Aid/FAFSA and how to apply to college were the two leading answers. 4 students who selected "Other" wrote about wanting to learn more about "migrant help" or felt that they already knew enough about admissions.

Analysis

The data collected in both Figure 1 and Figure 2 is significant as our assumptions going into our summer research were that family was the most important factor of a student's plan for their future goals. These assumptions came from our personal experiences from both the Latinx community and the migrant community. Based on the data displayed in Figure 3, we decided to center our implementation around helping our group of students around the college application process as well as financial aid.

Key Takeaways

Based on the data we collected from our two phases, we have many takeaways from UM faculty and the members of the Van Buren community.

- 100%** of parents surveyed (32 parents) thought a college education was very important
- 32%** of students surveyed (18 students) wanted to attend a four-year university, and
- 100%** of these students will be first generation students.

“**I don't want to be stuck in one place forever, I want to stay in one place and focus rather than move back and forth**”

This is a quote said by a student from one of our focus groups. While family is one of the most important factors described by both parents and students, students have the vision of pursuing higher education and creating a better life for themselves and their families.

Moving Forward

MEI has partnered with the Van Buren Intermediate School District. Proceeding the Capstone program, MEI has established two programs:

1. The Van Buren Incentive Program



- MEI has established a small fund of \$1,400 for the migrant students of VBISD to use in the event that they cannot pay for their application fee. Students will be encouraged to fill out the federal fee waiver for the selected universities, yet will be approved on a case-by-case basis.
- The goal of this program is to incentivize students to apply to multiple colleges. Students are eligible to apply for an application reimbursement up to 3 times.

2. VBISD Campus Day



- MEI plans to host migrant students coming from the VBISD at the University of Michigan.
- We are in the process of receiving funding for program housing as well as planning campus activities.

References

1. Roscigno, V. J. and Crowle, M. L. (2001), Rurality, Institutional Disadvantage, and Achievement/Attainment. *Rural Sociology*, 66: 268292.
2. "Lack of college guidance keeps poor and rural students from applying." *Bridge*. Ron French. 26 March 2015.

