



Improving Services For Migrant Students

ELIZABETH G. HILL • LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

The Migrant Education Program is a federally funded program that provides supplemental education services to migrant children. This report reviews the state's implementation of the program. We find that the state could better target resources and better serve migrant students by implementing a comprehensive package of reforms. Specifically, we recommend a number of modifications related to the program's: (1) funding and service model, (2) data system, and (3) carryover funding process. We also identify funding available to help in implementing these changes. (In Spanish) ■

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INTRODUCTION

The Migrant Education Program (MEP) provides supplemental education services to migrant children. The program currently provides these services primarily through a regional system of MEP centers—a model that has led to limited program accountability, poor coordination with other student services, and little statewide collaboration. Additionally, over the past several years the program has developed a significant balance of unspent federal funds.

We think the time is right for the Legislature to consider ways to improve the MEP. The bulk of state law governing the program was enacted more than 20 years ago—before the passage of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* and before the state had established its current statewide accountability system. Moreover, the California Department of Education (CDE) is currently in the process of conducting a federally mandated comprehensive needs assessment of the MEP to

determine a new statewide strategic vision for the program. The Legislature has a critical role to play in this reform process, ensuring that the program is effective in serving migrant students’ educational needs.

In this report, we recommend the Legislature implement a comprehensive package of reforms designed to improve the state’s MEP. Specifically, we recommend a number of modifications related to the program’s: (1) funding and service model, (2) data system, and (3) carryover funding process. We also identify funding available to help in implementing these changes and navigating the transition process. We think this package of reforms would help the state better target resources and better serve migrant students throughout the state. Below, we provide basic information about the state’s MEP. We then describe our recommended reforms in each of the three areas listed above.

BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Program

The MEP, created by the federal government in 1966, is intended to address the educational needs of highly mobile children whose family members are employed doing seasonal agricultural work. The MEP is funded almost entirely by federal funds. Figure 1 summarizes the objectives of the MEP.

Figure 1

Objectives of the Migrant Education Program

- ✓ Help reduce the educational disruptions that result from repeated relocations.
- ✓ Provide coordinated educational and support services.
- ✓ Ensure migrant children who move among the states are not adversely affected by differences in state education programs or requirements.
- ✓ Ensure migrant students are exposed to the same academic content and held to the same achievement standards as other children.
- ✓ Prepare migrant students to make a successful transition to postsecondary education or employment.

Program Provides Supplemental Services.

One of the requirements of the federal program is that MEP funds be used to address the needs of migrant students that are not addressed by other education programs. That is, the program must *supplement* the core academic program children receive during the regular school day. The federal government grants broad flexibility to states on how to implement MEP supplemental services. Figure 2 summarizes the services provided by California’s MEP and identifies how much of the state’s federal grant is currently being spent on each of these services.

Program Serves Children of Migrant Workers. Children are eligible to participate in the MEP if they or their parents or guardians are migrant workers in the agricultural, dairy, lumber, or fishing industries, and their family has moved for the purpose of finding temporary or seasonal employment during the past three years. Migrant students are eligible for program services from age 3 until they (1) attain a high school diploma or its equivalent or (2) turn 21. (Migrant students who are under age 21 but have not yet completed

high school and/or do not attend a traditional school are referred to as “out-of-school youth.”) Figure 3 provides some facts about the state’s migrant students.

Program Based on Regional System

Migrant education services are provided by 23 MEP centers located across California. Figure 4 (see page 6) shows the service area of each of the 23 centers. Fourteen of these cen-

Figure 2
Migrant Education Services and Spending

	Percent of Total State Expenditures
✓ Instructional Services, Regular School Year. Typical Migrant Education Program (MEP) expenditures include: hiring additional teachers, tutors and aides for the regular school day and after school programs; purchasing supplemental curriculum and materials; developing and distributing a statewide independent study program; hiring counselors and offering academic counseling programs; and administering preschool programs for migrant students ages 3-5. Various instructional services are also provided to students in nontraditional settings/venues who have not yet completed high school.	64%
✓ Administrative Services. The MEP has various direct and indirect administrative costs at the state and local levels.	14
✓ Instructional Services, Summer School. The MEP runs supplemental academic, enrichment, and leadership programs for migrant students during summer and intersession breaks.	7
✓ Student Identification and Data Collection. The program identifies and “recruits” eligible students in a variety of venues. In addition, MEP staff are responsible for entering basic information on each enrolled student into a statewide migrant student database.	7
✓ Health Services. The MEP often helps migrant families obtain various social and health services by arranging health screenings, offering health awareness workshops, and referring migrant students to health providers.	3
✓ Parent Participation. The MEP offers various activities for parents of migrant children, including: English as a second language, GED, and parenting skills classes; leadership institutes and seminars; and opportunities to participate in MEP parent advisory councils at the school, district, regional and state levels.	2
✓ Staff Development. The program provides training for staff who work with migrant students.	1

ters provide regional services to multiple school districts and are run out of county offices of education (COEs). As illustrated in the figure, some of these regional centers provide services to migrant students in more than one county. The remaining nine centers are operated by “direct-funded” school districts that serve only the students in their own districts.

Figure 5 (see page 7) shows the number of districts and students served by each center as well as its funding allotment. As shown in the figure, MEP centers vary dramatically in size, with one center responsible for providing services to almost 36,000 children in 191 school districts (spanning 22 counties), and another center serving just over 100 students in a one-school district. The selection of MEP centers has not been strategic, but rather has evolved over

time based on requests to CDE from individual districts and COEs.

Service Model Differs Across Regions. The 14 regional centers can choose to distribute funding to local districts to run their own district-based programs or keep funding at the COE and offer MEP services at the regional level. Most use a mixture of these two approaches, with the specific distribution varying significantly across regions. For example, one regional center reports that it distributes almost 90 percent of its regional funding directly to local districts to provide their own migrant student services, while another regional center distributes only 7 percent to local districts. The nine direct-funded district centers use their funding to run their own district-based migrant student services, and they do not rely on any other (district or county) MEP center.

Per-Student Funding Levels Have Declined.

In 2005-06, California received a total of \$127 million in federal funds for the MEP, the bulk of which is allocated to the MEP centers highlighted in Figures 4 and 5. Prior to 2002, state allocations fluctuated based on the state’s eligible migrant student population. Since then, the federal government has based states’ allocations on their 2002 student counts, regardless of whether their numbers of migrant students have increased. Since 2002, California’s mi-

Figure 3
Facts About California’s Migrant Students

- ✓ California is home to around 330,000 migrant students. This accounts for approximately one-third of the total U.S. migrant student population.
- ✓ Almost one-half of the state’s migrant students recently moved from Mexico to California, 43 percent moved from one region of the state to another, and 9 percent moved to California from another U.S. state.
- ✓ Around 43 percent of the state’s migrant children live in the Central Valley. Around 25 percent live on the Central Coast.
- ✓ Around 60 percent of the state’s school districts have migrant students in their classrooms.
- ✓ Around 70 percent of the state’s migrant students are in grades K-12. The remaining 30 percent are out-of-school youth or preschool age.
- ✓ About 98 percent of the state’s migrant students are Hispanic. The majority have limited proficiency in English.
- ✓ In 2004-05, less than 15 percent of the state’s migrant students scored at the proficient level in English language arts. Around 28 percent met proficiency targets in mathematics.

grant student population has increased 22 percent while its overall grant funding level has stayed relatively the same—resulting in a decline in per-student funding levels.

Bulk of State’s MEP Grant Is Distributed to MEP Centers. Currently, CDE distributes 85 percent of the total federal MEP grant to MEP centers based on counts of eligible migrant students. (The remaining 15 percent is maintained at CDE for program administration and statewide MEP initiatives.) Funds are distributed to the 23 centers based on a weighted per-pupil formula developed by CDE. This formula provides additional funding to centers that serve migrant children with certain characteristics, including: preschool-age children; children who are over-age for the grade in which they are placed (indicating they may have been retained or missed schooling at

some point); and out-of-school youth. Program administrators at CDE determined that these populations were especially needy and therefore deserved a higher funding “weight.”

Figure 4
Migrant Education Program (MEP) Centers

2005-06



FUNDING MODEL

Concerns With the Current Funding Model

We think the current migrant education funding model and formula have several problems. Specifically, for all but the nine school

district MEP centers, the current model results in a disconnect between funding and accountability as well as a lack of coordination between the MEP and other programs. In addition, the current MEP funding formula does not reflect statutory program priorities or encourage pro-

gram providers to serve all needy students, as discussed in more detail below.

Disconnect Between Who Is Funded and Who Is Accountable. The state has a comprehensive standards-based accountability system that is linked with certain benchmarks and growth targets intended to hold schools and districts accountable for student achievement. These benchmarks, as well as public sanctions and interventions, provide districts with incentives for improving the achievement of all students, including migrants. In contrast, no accountability system holds COEs responsible for migrant student performance or for the effectiveness of their MEP services. Yet, under the

Figure 5
Migrant Education Program Centers Vary Significantly in Size

2005-06

Service Provider	Number of Districts Served ^a	Number of Migrant Students Enrolled ^b	Percent of Statewide Migrant Students ^b	Total Center Funding
Regional Centers^c:				
Butte	191	35,675	11%	\$12,637,876
Fresno	29	30,949	9	10,115,926
Monterey	18	30,087	9	9,478,956
Kern	33	29,476	9	10,281,111
Tulare	54	23,572	7	8,143,708
Santa Clara	54	22,675	7	7,497,415
San Joaquin	25	21,960	7	7,669,352
Merced	51	20,882	6	6,940,980
Los Angeles	51	20,276	6	6,659,884
San Diego	54	16,812	5	5,475,465
Imperial	15	12,987	4	3,902,440
Ventura	13	12,953	4	3,667,101
Santa Barbara	25	8,667	3	2,447,095
Riverside	12	6,573	2	1,883,324
School District Centers:				
Pajaro Valley Unified	1	14,801	4	\$4,622,998
Bakersfield City Elementary	1	8,995	3	2,379,938
Santa Maria Bonita	1	3,949	1	1,343,140
San Jose Unified	1	2,353	1	619,107
Delano Joint Union High	1	2,004	1	589,282
Lindsay Unified	1	1,837	1	645,825
Oxnard Elementary	1	1,381	__d	331,980
Lost Hills Union	1	905	__d	361,665
Semitropic	1	112	__d	29,724
	634	329,881	100%	\$107,724,292

^a Data from 2004-05, provided by statewide migrant student database. Count only includes districts with migrant students.

^b Enrollment for regular school year. Centers report separate counts for number of migrant students served during summer or intersession.

^c Operated out of county offices of education. The regional center may serve districts in more than one county.

^d Less than 1 percent.

current MEP model, regional centers run out of COEs are responsible for providing supplemental services for almost 90 percent of the state's migrant students. Thus, the state program is currently structured such that, in most cases, resources and responsibility for migrant student services lie with COEs, whereas accountability for outcomes lies with districts.

Lack of Coordination Between MEP Services and Other Programs. In many cases, little coordination exists between the services migrant students receive at school and the supplemental services they receive through their regional MEP center. In some school districts, staff are largely unaware of the services being provided to their migrant students through the COE-based regional center. Furthermore, regional centers do not have access to many of the other supplemental funds and programs that are available to serve many migrant students—such as Title I, Part A, and Title III federal funds. They, therefore, have limited opportunities to leverage and coordinate different resources—even though the program is intended to encourage pooling resources for a coordinated complement of student services.

Funding Formula Does Not Reflect Statutory Program Priorities. As discussed, the CDE distributes funding to centers using a formula that is based on certain characteristics of migrant students. The particular characteristics selected by CDE administrators do not reflect the MEP priorities outlined in state and federal law. For example, state law places greater priority on school-age as opposed to preschool-age children, and federal law stipulates that “priority for service” be accorded to (1) students whose education has been interrupted during the *current* school year and (2) students who are failing or are most at risk of failing to meet state con-

tent and performance standards. While the MEP may be following federal law by serving these targeted students, there is a disconnect between these identified priorities and the methodology by which CDE allocates funding for the program.

Funding Formula Does Not Encourage Broad Participation. The current formula CDE uses to allocate the majority of MEP funds is based on the number of migrant students who are *eligible* to receive MEP services in the regular school year, as opposed to the number of migrant students a center *actually* serves. Thus, MEP centers have a strong fiscal incentive to *identify* eligible migrant students, but no fiscal incentive to ensure they actually receive MEP services.

Revise Funding Model to Improve Quality of Services and Enhance Accountability

We recommend the Legislature revise the migrant education funding model to send the majority of funds directly to school districts rather than regional centers. We recommend, however, maintaining some funds at county offices of education for certain regional activities and some funds at the California Department of Education for certain statewide activities.

The majority of other U.S. states—including Texas, Florida, and Arizona (which have relatively large migrant populations)—have structured their state MEPs around a *district*-level funding and service model. Currently, California follows this model in only nine districts. Implementing this structure statewide likely would result in more effective migrant student services. Specifically, as shown in Figure 6, we suggest that 70 percent of the annual federal grant be allocated to districts using a revised weighted student formula based on district counts of migrant

students. This would result in all districts receiving funding directly from the state, similar to the nine existing direct-funded districts. Districts would then have primary responsibility for providing supplemental instructional services to their migrant students. We recommend the remaining 30 percent of MEP funds be allocated to COE-based regional centers (15 percent) and CDE (15 percent). Because state law currently establishes regional centers as the “primary method for the delivery of services to migrant students,” our suggested modifications to the MEP funding model would require statutory change.

Deriving a New Funding Allocation. We developed the 70 percent district, 15 percent county, 15 percent state funding allocation by aligning responsibilities under the current system with current expenditure patterns. Under our proposed service model, districts would have primary responsibility for MEP instructional services, program administration, and migrant parent participation. As such, we believe the majority of the funds MEP centers currently spend on these activities should be allocated directly to districts. As discussed further below,

there also are certain activities—such as student recruitment, health services, and staff development—that would make sense to continue delivering at the regional level. Based on our analysis, 15 percent of the total state grant is sufficient to allow regional centers to continue offering these types of services as well as cover associated staffing and administrative expenses. We recommend maintaining the current level of expenditures (15 percent) and services at the state level, which we also discuss below.

Shift to Districts Would Help Overcome Existing Problems. Shifting the majority of MEP funding away from COE-based regional centers and providing it directly to school districts would streamline the system—providing districts with both the resources and the responsibility to serve migrant students and improve their academic achievement. Districts not only know the content of the instruction migrant students are receiving during the regular school day, but they have the state assessment data to identify individual students’ academic needs. Therefore, they are better positioned to develop supplemental instruction for migrant students that

aligns with and supports the students’ broader instructional program. In addition, districts have greater options for meeting the federal requirement to coordinate migrant student services with other student services. Because districts have access to and control over school facilities, transportation, and schedules, and oversee

Figure 6
Restructuring MEP Funding Model

(Percent of Federal MEP Grant)

	Current System	LAO Recommendation
School districts	9% ^a	70%
Regional support centers	76 ^b	15
Statewide initiatives	15	15
Totals	100%	100%

^a Reflects funding provided to school districts that are currently designated as Migrant Education Program (MEP) centers. Does not include funding passed through to some school districts by COE regional centers.

^b The COEs provide a portion of this funding to local districts, but statewide data on these pass-throughs are not available. Different regions report passing through anywhere between 7 percent and 90 percent of their funding to local districts.

many other educational programs, they are more easily able to pool other funding sources together with MEP funds. Finally, transitioning to a district-based funding and service model also would allow the state to use the existing statewide accountability system to monitor migrant student outcomes, hold districts responsible for providing effective supplemental services, and identify districts in need of intervention assistance.

Regional Centers Can Complement District Services. Although we think most MEP funding can be best used by distributing it directly to districts, we recommend about 15 percent of the federal grant be retained for regional centers and services. Certain MEP services, highlighted in Figure 7, likely would be more cost effective if delivered at the regional level. In particular, regional centers likely are better positioned to provide services that occur off school-site or are not directly related to K-12 education.

Additional Regional Centers Could Be Established to Better Support Districts. As noted earlier, currently only 14 of the 58 COEs in the state offer MEP services. During the transition to the new funding and service model, regional support services should be maintained within the COEs that already have MEP knowledge and experience. These regional centers would continue to support the districts they currently serve. They also would assume some responsibility for the nine existing direct-funded districts.

After the initial transition, MEP regional support responsibilities and funding could be expanded to some additional COEs, especially to those areas, such as Sonoma and Napa, currently serving large migrant populations. This would ensure regional support was readily accessible to districts throughout the state.

Maintain Regional Capacity While Increasing Local Flexibility. Our proposed share of funding should allow regional centers to maintain capacity for offering to districts the types of MEP services listed in Figure 7. To allow for maximum local flexibility, districts also should be permitted to use their MEP grants to purchase services from their regional center. (Districts with very small populations of migrant students would likely find it more cost effective either to form consortia with other neighboring districts or purchase the majority of MEP services from their regional center.) The state would need to clearly establish what level of support regional centers would provide using their state grant and which MEP services they could offer to districts on a user-fee basis.

Figure 7

Migrant Education Services Regional Centers Could Provide Under New Service Model

- ✓ Services for out-of-school youth and preschool children.
- ✓ Identification and recruitment of eligible migrant students in venues outside of the regular school setting.
- ✓ Student health screenings and referrals.
- ✓ Technical assistance and professional development for teachers and administrators.
- ✓ Special regional events, such as seminars or institutes for migrant students and parents.

Some Statewide Initiatives Should Be Maintained. Currently, CDE maintains about 15 percent of federal MEP funds at the state level. One percent of the grant is used for statewide program administration and the other 14 percent is used for various program activities that are organized at the state level. These activities include: the MiniCorps migrant student tutoring program; a statewide independent study curriculum (the Portable Assisted Study Sequence, or PASS program); the migrant preschool program; and the statewide migrant student information network (MSIN). To ensure some consistency in MEP services across the state, we recommend maintaining the current practice of funding these activities.

Revise Funding Model to Reflect Program Priorities

We recommend the Legislature direct the California Department of Education to (1) revise the per-pupil funding formula so that it emphasizes federal and state program priorities and (2) report back on proposed revisions once it has completed its statewide needs assessment.

State law should align with federal law regarding which migrant students receive priority for service. These priorities then should be reflected in the state's funding formula. Additionally, districts should be provided with fiscal incentives to ensure they are meeting the needs of all migrant students. The basis for funding allocations therefore should incorporate both counts of *eligible* migrant students as well as students who actually *participate* in the MEP.

Toward these ends, we recommend the Legislature direct CDE to develop a new per-pupil funding formula. This revision process should be a part of CDE's comprehensive needs assessment of the MEP, which is currently in progress. We recommend the Legislature direct CDE to report back by October 31, 2006, regarding the revised formula and other program changes resulting from the needs assessment. (This report should be provided in conjunction with an update on the migrant student database and development of a transition plan, as discussed further below.) The revised formula could become operative in 2007-08.

MIGRANT EDUCATION DATA SYSTEM

Currently, the state contracts with two companies to maintain a database of migrant student information, known as the MSIN. The current database includes student demographic information and information about families' most recent "qualifying" move for migratory employment. Other than grade in school, the system does *not* encompass any information related to the students' academic experience, such as assessment data and English proficiency level. The database also does not maintain any student health-related information. Although an optional

field exists for program staff to input what MEP services the student has received, this feature is not always used.

Current Database Provides Limited Benefit. One of the primary goals of the MEP is to reduce the educational disruption experienced by migrant students when they move. Yet, under the current migrant education information system, the database is only capable of providing the receiving MEP center with very limited information, such as where a student is moving from and how long he or she has been classified

as a migrant student. Furthermore, access to the database is restricted primarily to MEP center staff. In the 14 COE-based regional centers, this means even the limited migrant student information contained in the system is largely unavailable to district and school-level staff. Consequently, with each move, migrant students essentially start their educational program anew, with the receiving school district knowing little to nothing about their needs or the MEP services they had been receiving. (Access to the database is not an issue in the nine district-based MEP centers.)

Disconnect Between Data Systems. The CDE is currently working to try to incorporate individual migrant students' California School Information Services (CSIS) numbers and state assessment data into the MSIN, however it has not yet identified an efficient ongoing process for inputting and updating these data elements. This is largely due to the disconnect that often exists between the school districts, where students' CSIS numbers and assessment data are maintained, and the COE-based regional centers, where the MSIN is accessed and updated.

Regional Centers Are Developing Their Own Data Systems. All of the MEP centers currently collect data on migrant students beyond what is maintained in the MSIN, including information obtained from a statutorily required individual student needs assessment. (This typically includes a variety of student academic, health, and family information.) Each of the centers collects and maintains this information in a different format. Moreover, when the student moves, this information is typically not shared. Many of the centers are responding to the limitations of the MSIN by spending a portion of their local grants to build their own databases to collect

and maintain more comprehensive information on migrant students. These efforts are not being coordinated at the state level, and the individual databases are not being designed to share or transfer information across regions or districts.

Enhancing Data System Could Improve Program Effectiveness

We recommend expanding the state's migrant education data system to include more data elements. We also recommend providing district and school personnel access to the enhanced system. We recommend setting aside up to \$4 million in carryover funds for this purpose.

Collecting consistent information on migrant students and sharing it across the state would ease students' transitions when they move to new schools as well as help create more coordinated statewide MEP services. This in turn would help meet the program goal of minimizing disruptions in migrant students' educational programs.

Statewide System More Cost Effective. A statewide solution would be considerably more cost effective and beneficial to the state than 23 different information systems. In building an enhanced system, the state has several options it could pursue.

- **Expand State's Current Database.** The state could opt to work within the framework of the current MSIN and simply expand it to include more data elements. (The CDE has recently requested authorization to pursue this option as a temporary solution.)
- **Piggy-Back on Statewide Student Data System Efforts.** It may be possible for the

CSIS system to encompass additional data fields and functionalities regarding migrant students that would eliminate the need for a separate data system.

➤ **Join Existing Interstate Network.**

Currently, ten states participate in the New Generation System, a comprehensive migrant student database that maintains and shares information when students move across state lines. The state of Washington also has a well-regarded migrant student information system. California could opt into one of these established networks.

➤ **Develop New Database.** The state could develop an entirely new database from scratch. (The CDE has indicated it may pursue this option in the future.)

Figure 8

Desired Features of an Enhanced Migrant Student Database

- ✓ Capable of interfacing with and uploading information from the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System and the California School Information Services to avoid duplication of effort.
- ✓ Can be accessed and updated by school and district personnel who work with migrant students on a daily basis.
- ✓ Compliant with new federal requirements that state migrant databases contain: (1) student achievement data, (2) immunization records, and (3) high school course credits.
- ✓ Contains optional fields for staff to input additional migrant student information, such as participation in bilingual education, and health issues that have been identified or are being treated (such as dental or vision needs).
- ✓ Standardized across state so information can be shared immediately and easily when students move.

We recommend the Legislature direct CDE to investigate the most feasible approach and report back on its progress by October 31, 2006.

Statewide System Should Include Various Enhancements. We believe that, regardless of which option the state decides to pursue, the migrant student database should encompass various features, as listed in Figure 8.

CARRYOVER FUNDS

The MEP typically expends around 95 percent of its annual federal grant, generating about \$6 million in carryover funds each year. Currently, however, sizeable carryover remains from prior years (approximately \$20 million, as of December 2005).

Large Carryover Balance Is Largely Due to Timing Issues From Previous Years. The accumulation of MEP carryover funds is primarily due to a fiscal calendar change that occurred in 2003. The change meant MEP centers received a full 12-month grant appropriation in 2002-03 but had only ten months to expend the funding. The result was that \$29 million carried over from 2002-03 to 2003-04. Large carryover balances remain—recent estimates from CDE indicate that at year-end 2005-06, carryover will be at least \$20 million.

Use Carryover Funds to Build Better System

We recommend the Legislature use (1) up to \$4 million in carryover funds to enhance the migrant student database and (2) the remainder of the carryover funds to help transition to a district-based service model. Toward this end, we recommend the Legislature direct the California Department of Education to develop a transition plan and an associated spending plan and report back by October 31, 2006.

The 2006-07 Governor's Budget proposal appropriates \$19 million in MEP carryover funds to serve migrant students attending schools classified as Program Improvement (PI) schools based on data from 2003-04. (Under the federal school accountability system, schools that do not meet student performance goals for two or

more consecutive years are classified as PI.) We have concerns with restricting the use of carryover funding only to PI schools.

According to 2003-04 data provided by CDE, only about 30 percent of the state's migrant student population attends PI schools. The remaining students either attend non-PI schools or do not attend a traditional K-12 school (including preschool-age students and out-of-school youth). Thus, the majority of the state's migrant students would not benefit from the Governor's proposed use of carryover funds.

Based on our review of the program, we suggest the Legislature instead spend existing carryover funds on critical statewide initiatives that would benefit all migrant students. Specifically, we recommend using up to \$4 million to improve the migrant student database, as described above, and using the remainder (approximately \$16 million) to assist in the transition to a district-centered system.

Plan Needed for Transition to District-Based Service Model. If the state chooses to revise the MEP funding and service model to focus on school districts instead of regional centers, the current system would undergo a significant transition. Our recommended use of carryover funds would allow county and state-level staff to provide districts with training and on-site technical assistance as they develop new district-based MEP services. It would also help regional centers adjust their staffing levels and scope of services as they transition to the new model.

The scope of this transition would likely vary across different regions of the state, with those areas in which the regional center provides the bulk of the MEP services undergoing the great-

est change. For example, a district like Napa Valley Unified, which enrolls around 1,500 migrant students, would have to create and establish a completely new district-based MEP. This is because its students currently receive all MEP services from the regional center based out of the Butte COE. Similarly, the Butte regional center would have to scale back its staffing and service levels to adjust for the loss of funds now flowing directly to Napa Valley students. Under our proposal, the existing MEP centers would receive one-time funds to ease the transition to the district-centered service and funding model. These funds essentially would allow for a more gradual transfer of student programs from the existing MEP centers to the districts themselves. Existing MEP centers also could use the transitional funding to provide training and technical assistance, as well as transfer services and staff to the district level.

We recommend the Legislature direct CDE to develop a timeline and plan for transitioning to this new service model. The plan should include a proposal for allocating and using one-time transitional funds. The CDE should report back to Legislature by October 31, 2006, regarding this plan. (As noted earlier, this report should also include a description of the revised weighted pupil allocation formula, results from

the comprehensive needs assessment process, and an update on the best option for enhancing the migrant student database.)

Authorize Limited Local Carryover Authority

We recommend the Legislature adopt budget bill language that would allow up to 5 percent of annual migrant education funding to carryover at the local level.

We recommend the Legislature allow local service providers to carryover up to 5 percent of their MEP grant each year, with any additional carryover above this level designated for specific legislative priorities. Given that the state expects local agencies to be fiscally responsible and not exceed their annual budget allocations, districts and regional centers tend to budget somewhat conservatively and typically do not spend all of their MEP grants. A further technical budgeting challenge arises because a significant portion of MEP services are offered during the summer, which straddles the state's fiscal year. Under our recommendation, the Legislature would not have to approve expenditure of this 5 percent carryover as part of the annual budget process. We recommend that any carryover beyond the 5 percent level continue to be appropriated by the Legislature for statewide priorities.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we think the state should adopt a package of reforms designed to enhance the MEP and provide more effective services to migrant students. Figure 9 summarizes our recommendations. Taken as a comprehensive reform package, these recommendations would require statutory changes. We recommend coupling these changes with various fiscal actions that would direct one-time carryover funds toward building a better system and easing the transition process.

Whether in combination or pursued separately, we think these reforms would lead to significant improvements in migrant student services. In particular, we think these reforms would lead to: better coordination among MEP services, students' core academic programs, and other education programs; a greater ability to hold districts accountable for

migrant student performance; better incentives to serve all migrant students; a more useful and cost-effective solution to sharing student information; and, perhaps most importantly, less educational disruption for migrant students.

Figure 9

Summary of LAO Migrant Education Program Recommendations

- ✓ **Revise Funding Model**
 - Revise the migrant education funding model to send 70 percent of funds directly to school districts, 15 percent to the county offices of education-based regional centers, and 15 percent to the California Department of Education (CDE) for statewide activities.
 - Direct CDE to revise the per-pupil funding formula to emphasize federal and state priorities.
- ✓ **Enhance Migrant Student Database**
 - Expand the state's migrant education data system to include more data elements.
 - Provide district and school personnel access to the enhanced system.
- ✓ **Use Carryover Funds to Build Better System**
 - Use up to \$4 million in carryover funds to enhance the migrant student database.
 - Use remaining carryover funds (around \$16 million) to help transition to a district-based funding and service model.
 - Authorize up to 5 percent of annual migrant education funding to carryover at the local level.
- ✓ **Require Report to Legislature**
 - Direct CDE to report back to the Legislature by October 31, 2006, regarding its progress in implementing changes to the program.