

**Suggested Guidelines for Grade-Level
Placement of Migrant Students from Mexico
Attending Texas Schools for the First Time**



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INTRODUCTION

The placement of binational migrant students in the most appropriate education setting may be critical to ensure the academic success of the students and should not be taken lightly by school personnel. The Center for Migrant Education has developed a set of suggested guidelines for the placement of migrant students that takes into consideration four critical factors: the acquisition of English language skills, the educational knowledge and skills acquired by the binational student in Mexico, the need to establish high academic goals and high expectations for these students, and the involvement of parents in the decision-making process.

First priority in the education of binational migrant students is the acquisition of English language skills that will ensure access to high levels of achievement in every content area and in all aspects of life in American society. As a priority, the placement of limited English proficient (LEP) students must take into consideration that the student must be served in a bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) program that will ensure the acquisition of the literacy skills that will enable the students to continue their education in the United States. The placement of binational migrant students must meet all required rules for bilingual education programs in the state of Texas.

A second critical factor is the educational foundation that the students acquired in their native country. Research conducted at the University of Texas (Gonzalez, 2001) found that a solid educational foundation is a major factor that contributes to the incorporation of successful Mexican migrant high school students into U.S. society. Anecdotal data and teachers' testimonies tend to show that students with a strong educational foundation have a high probability of becoming academically successful in the United States and in many cases graduate with the highest grade-point-averages in their classes. The foundation obtained by the students must be carefully assessed and must be used as a base to further promote individual growth and development. Students who have attended *Primaria*, *Secundaria*, and *Preparatoria* schools in Mexico come to the United States with a wealth of experiences and knowledge that must be appreciated and taken into consideration in the design of their educational program. Furthermore, placement should be flexible. Student progress must be monitored closely,

especially immediately after initial placement, in order to make adjustments as needed, and continuous support should be provided to the students so they may transition smoothly to their new setting.

The third factor has reference to a need to have high expectations for all children including binational students. The state of Texas has established high academic standards for all students and holds the Texas public education system accountable for providing all students with a quality of education that enables them to achieve their full potential. Additionally, federal law reference to Title 1, Part C, section 1301, Education of Migratory Children of the ESEA, states that the purpose of this law is to ensure that migratory children have the opportunity to meet the same challenging State content standards and challenging State student performance standards that all children are expected to meet. Section 1001 further states that: The Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States that a high-quality education for all individuals and a fair and equal opportunity to obtain that education are a societal good, are a moral imperative, and improve the life of every individual, because the quality of our individual lives ultimately depends on the quality of the lives of others.

The fourth factor takes into consideration of the participation of the parents in placement decisions. The decision-making process for the placement of migrant students cannot be effective without the participation of the parents and, whenever possible, of the students themselves. The school should communicate to the parents the high expectations that the state of Texas has for all students, and explain to them all graduation requirements and the rules and regulations that govern the school and affect placement choices. In addition, the school should attempt to find out the educational aspirations of parents and students and make every effort to support them.

Overall, taking a “strengths perspective” approach when making decisions about placement and educational program design will greatly enhance the chances of success of binational migrant students. If the school takes into consideration the strengths of each student in making placement decisions, and builds upon those strengths, the students will feel appreciated as individuals and motivated to achieve. Research on the factors that contribute to the successful incorporation of Mexican migrant students has found that these children have a

tremendous desire to succeed and to become active contributors to U.S. society, and that inclusion into the social fabric of the school community is critical to their success. It is important, in determining placement, to take advantage of the student's high level of motivation and to promote their social inclusion in the school community as essential components of their educational program.

Finally, placement should always be flexible. Once a decision has been made, it is necessary to monitor the student's academic performance to verify its adequacy, make adjustments as needed, and ensure that the student is being provided the necessary support to achieve a smooth and successful transition to the new educational environment.

I. STUDENTS WITH RECORDS

A. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from *pre-escolar* and *Primaria* schools (equivalent to PK-6 in U.S.).

- A student who completed a year of *Primaria* in Mexico should be placed in the next grade level in Texas.
- A student who was attending school in Mexico and transfers to a school in Texas during the school year should be placed in the same grade level that he/she was attending in Mexico.
- A student who left school in Mexico before the end of the last school year, but completed 80% of required school days or more and had a passing average should be placed in the next grade level.
- A student who left school in Mexico before the end of the last school year and did not complete 80% of required school days should be placed in same grade level.
- If the student failed Spanish or Mathematics in *Primaria*, the student will be placed in the same grade level in Texas.

B. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from first and second year of *Secundaria* schools (equivalent to 7th and 8th grades in U.S.).

- A student who completed 1st or 2nd year of *Secundaria* in Mexico should be placed in the next grade level in Texas.
- A student who left *Secundaria* school before the end of the school year, but attended 80% of required school days or more and had a passing average should be placed in the next grade level.
- A student who left *Secundaria* school in Mexico before the end of the school year, and attended less than 80% of required school days should be placed in the same grade level.
- A student who was attending *Secundaria* school in Mexico and transferred to a school in Texas during the school year should be placed in the same grade level.

C. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from third year of *Secundaria* schools (equivalent to 9th grade in the U.S.).

- A student who completed the third year of *Secundaria* may be granted credit equivalent to one year of high school courses. Credit for the following courses may be awarded:

Spanish I and II (In addition, the student may take credit by examination for Spanish III, and IV).

Algebra I, and Geometry

Integrated Physics and Chemistry

Physical Education (1 credit)

Art (1 credit)

Keyboarding (.5 credit)

- A student who left third year of *Secundaria* school before the end of the school year, but attended 80% of required school days or more and had a passing average should be granted credit equivalent to one year of high school courses.
- A student who left the third year of *Secundaria* and transferred to Texas during the school year should be placed in similar courses of the same grade level if possible.

It is recommended that as many credits as possible be granted so that the student may concentrate on the acquisition of English language skills.

D. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from *Preparatoria* schools (equivalent to 10th to 12th grades in U.S.).

A student who graduated from a *Preparatoria* in Mexico and transfers to the United States should be given the opportunity to enroll in high school.

- It is recommended that the academic record from *Preparatoria* be evaluated and credit be awarded for courses that match the description in the list of Texas high school graduation requirements.
- There is a significant diversity of *Preparatoria* programs in Mexico; however the following courses are common to many *Preparatoria* programs and depending on the total semesters completed in *Preparatoria* credit may be awarded for the following courses:

Algebra I and II, Geometry, Pre-Calculus, and Calculus

Spanish I, II, and III

IPC, Biology, Chemistry and Physics

World History, World Geography

Fine Arts, PE (2 credits), Keyboarding (.5 credit), Business Computer Information Systems

Elective Courses as appropriate based on similarity of courses taken in Mexico and courses offered in Texas high schools.

- Effort should be made to award credits to place the student at approximately the next grade level to the grade completed in Mexico.

Courses in most *Preparatorias* in Mexico are semester-based. If a student transferred to Texas after completing one full semester, the student may be granted credit for courses completed the previous semester.

- The student should be given credit for courses taken in Mexico if the student attended at least 80% of required school days and had a passing grade.

II. STUDENTS WITHOUT RECORDS

Students who come from schools in Mexico without records may be temporarily placed in school according to the guidelines contained in this section. If records are obtained, placement may be modified accordingly; otherwise, student's progress should be monitored and adjustments made as needed to ensure the academic success of the student. Placement decisions must be made in direct consultation with the parents in every case, but in the case of students without records the participation of the parents is even more critical for making the most adequate choices. Parents should be asked to provide the necessary records, however, it is also the responsibility of the Migrant Program staff to request student records utilizing the Binational Migrant Education Directory.

A. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from *pre-escolar* and *Primaria* schools (equivalent to Pre K – 6th grade in U.S.) without records.

- A student who, according to the parents, completed a *Primaria* grade level in Mexico should be placed in the next grade level in Texas.
- A student, who transfers in the middle of the school year, should be placed in the same grade level he/she was in Mexico (as reported by parent or student).
- If the grade level is not known by the parents, placement should be at an age-appropriate grade level.
- The performance of the student should be closely monitored in order to make adjustments as needed to ensure academic success of the student.

B. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from first and second year of *Secundaria* schools (equivalent to 7th and 8th grades in U.S.) without records.

- If the student and/or parent state that the student completed first or second year of *Secundaria*, place the student in the next grade level.

- If the student and/or parent state that the student was attending *Secundaria* in Mexico and transferred in the middle of the school year, place the student in the same grade level that he/she was attending in Mexico.
- If the student and/or parent state that the student left *Secundaria* school before the end of the school year, but attended 80% or more of required school days and had a passing average, place the student in the next grade level.
- If the student and/or parent state that the student left *Secundaria* school before the end of the school year and did not attend 80% of required school days place the student in the same grade level.
- If the student brings proper documentation later in the school year, placement may be modified and the guidelines in the section may be followed.

C. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from third year of *Secundaria* schools (equivalent to 9th grade in U.S) without records.

- If the student and/or parent state that the student finished *Secundaria*, but does not have any documents, place the student in 9th grade pending assessment of documentation. If no documentation is presented, no credits for high school will be awarded.
- If the student and/or parent state that the student was attending third grade of *Secundaria* in Mexico and transferred in the middle of the school year, place the student in ninth grade with no credits pending assessment of documentation. If no documentation is presented, no credits for high school will be awarded.
- If the student and/or parent state that the student left third year of *Secundaria* before the end of the school year, but attended 80% or more of required school days and had a passing average, place the student in ninth grade pending assessment of documentation.
- If the student and/or parent state that the student left *Secundaria* school before the end of the school year and did not attend 80% of required school days place the student in ninth grade with no credits.
- If the student brings proper documentation later in the school year, placement may be modified and the guidelines in the section may be followed.

D. Suggested guidelines for placement of students transferring from *Preparatoria* schools (equivalent to 10th – 12th grades in U.S.) without records.

- If the student and/or parent state that the student completed a semester or more of *Preparatoria*, but do not have any documents, place the students in 9th grade pending assessment of documentation. If no documentation is presented, no credits for high school will be awarded.

III. STUDENTS WHO HAVE NOT ATTENDED SCHOOL

Suggested guidelines for placement of students who have never attended school

- Students who have never attended school should be placed according to age in alternative settings that focus on English language acquisition and basic skills.