

2018-2019

**REITER AFFILIATED COMPANIES
COMMUNITY CHILDCARE REPORT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Throughout this project to research the issues and potential opportunities for childcare and education for farmworkers in Oxnard, CA, I had to really understand some of the challenges farmworkers face on a daily basis due to their occupation. Agricultural workers have unique childcare needs compared to other traditional workforces such as; early morning hours and late day hours, Saturday and Sunday work days, fluctuating work schedules based on season, weather and crop cycles, lack of transportation, and language barriers. Despite the fact that the agriculture workforce provides \$2-billion a year to the agriculture industry in Ventura County, data collected indicates that children of farmworkers do not have the same access to educational advantages available as other low-income children in Ventura County.

Farm working families have difficulty in accessing childcare and educational programming such as early childhood development programs in the communities where they work. This is due to their inability to qualify for state and federally subsidized spaces, the cost of care, lack of weekend care, hours of childcare services, and lack of overall spaces. Existing programs in the community need to change their programming so that they can align with the actuality of the farmworkers and the agriculture industry in California and prevent a widening gap of childcare and education for the children of farmworkers. Below you will find some of the Community Childcare Report major findings.

Major Findings

- Farmworkers not qualifying to federally-funded childcare centers/preschools. Many farmworkers surpass household federal poverty guidelines and the number of farmworkers qualifying to these programs will continue to decrease due to California's minimum wage increases, agricultural overtime increases as well as non-productive time earnings. A strawberry harvester we interviewed was over-income by \$5 dollars and was put on an over-income waitlist, prioritizing income-eligible families for the program.
- The Cliff Effect. In many cases, low-income farm working families will closely monitor their wages so as to not lose subscriptions in federal or state subsidized programs. If they see their wages reaching government "thresholds", they will stop working altogether, as the subsidies that they receive are far greater in their monetary value than their salaried earnings, even with the increases to their pay. This is known as the "cliff effect" and many farmworkers fall into this dilemma of having to choose between increased salary and reduction of subsidies or vice versa.
- Farmworkers not qualifying to California state-funded childcare centers/preschools. Many farmworkers are not qualifying due to enrollment starting in May and June and are asked for their past three month's pay stubs as proof of income. However, farmworkers often surpass state income guidelines due to the fact that their last three pay stubs may have provided during the highest peak season of pay (the peak harvest). Although income during those months is high, it does not reflect the reality of their average gross yearly income. When they try to apply later in the year when income has dropped, centers tend to already be at full capacity.
- Decline of children and farmworkers who are Migrant.
 - 77% of farmworkers surveyed in the Oxnard community, indicated not leaving the region/moving in search for work.
 - Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo-Migrant and Seasonal Head Start had a 38% decrease from 2007-2016 of children ages 0-5 who are migrant. The Migrant Education Program in California had a 36% decrease from 2010-2015 of children ages 3-21 who are migrant.
 - Growers are implementing innovative farming practices to extend crop seasonality and create work availability for most of the year in the cities where farmworkers live due to the shortage of available agricultural labor.

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- Decline of children and farmworkers who are Migrant. (Cont.)
 - Affordable housing not available. There is a housing problematic in California that has led farm working families to overpay for housing and overcrowd their living space by sharing space with other families, live in garages, and even sheds. Less farmworkers opt to migrate when they find an affordable and stable place to live where they work.
 - Farmworkers want stability for their families, and they are aware of the importance of stability in order for their children to thrive.
 - Overall, there are less people migrating to the U.S. due to tighter border security.

So, one might ask, "Who is providing care for the children of farmworkers?" The majority of farmworkers surveyed indicated that their children were taken care of by an unlicensed childcare provider. An unlicensed childcare provider, utilized by farmworkers, is usually un-trained, provides for many children at one time, and does not have appropriate space or equipment to provide care for children. They really on family members or local community members that are trusted by other farmworkers.

Numerous research studies have indicated the positive impact early learning development programs have on children to increase their academics and learning skills which are critical to the long-term potential of social mobility. Sadly, many children of farmworkers are omitted from an early education development program because their source of childcare is through unlicensed providers.

A potential long-term solution to equitable childcare and education for children of farmworkers is to launch a California Pilot for children of Agriculture workers. A path in reducing barriers for families working in agriculture is to modify eligibility requirements as it relates to the Migrant and Seasonal status and income. More farm working families are settling in the communities where they work, which provides stability and an increase in household income. A California pilot would seek to prove a need for an agriculture worker criterion and prove that Migrant or Seasonal criteria programs are in need of modification and adjustment to their eligibility requirements. This is more realistic and relevant to the needs of an evolving agricultural industry and the high cost of living in California. The long-term objective would be to utilize the research and data from this pilot to demonstrate the need for systemic change at a national level.

Times are changing, and existing programs need to change as well. It is evident that the children of farmworkers face educational inequity due to unrealistic outdated program eligibility requirements. As RAC's philanthropy mission guides us to work as a community "To build healthier lives for farm workers and their families in our communities", we must create educational equity for the children of farm working families.

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