
What Would Be the Impact if Trump Succeeds in Defunding Programs Helping the Children of Migrant Families and Students Learning English? A Q&A.



As Congress debates how to allocate funds for K-12 education in 2026, programs that serve students learning English and the children of migrant families are on the chopping block. The Trump administration has proposed eliminating Title III-A, which assists students learning English, and the Migrant Education Program, which serves the children of families who work in migrant or seasonal jobs. In addition, the administration is currently withholding or “impounding” more than a billion dollars that Congress has already allocated to the two programs for use in 2025.

In this Q&A, [Tania Hogan](#) and [Kathy Escamilla](#) explain what these programs are, what research has to say about the services they fund, and how their elimination might impact students and schools. Dr. Hogan is a former bilingual education teacher and directs the [BUENO Center for Multicultural Education](#) at the University of Colorado Boulder. As a result of the impoundment, funding is currently in limbo for BUENO programs serving migrant and seasonal farmworker students and their families. Dr. Escamilla is Professor Emerita at the University of Colorado Boulder and an NEPC Fellow. Her research focuses on educational issues related to Spanish-speaking language minority students in U.S. schools.

Q: What are Title III-A and the Migrant Education Program?

A: Title III-A provides federal funding for programs for “English Learners” (ELs)—a term defined by federal law but not necessarily reflective of the full linguistic and cultural assets of these students. The funding is used to help ELs attain English proficiency and meet academic standards by supporting language instruction, teacher professional development, and family engagement. When guided by culturally sustaining pedagogy, these efforts do more than teach English. They affirm that students’ home languages are assets to preserve and expand, not problems to fix. These efforts also ensure that identified students do have full access to content area instruction so they do not fall behind in these subjects while learning English.

The Migrant Education Program (MEP), established in 1966, supports students whose families move for agricultural or seasonal labor. It provides academic support, summer programs, interstate record transfers, and access to high school equivalency and postsecondary pathways. These services are crucial for students navigating the compounded impact of educational disruption, poverty, and marginalization.

Together, these programs represent a federal commitment to honoring students’ full humanity and ensuring continuity in education, esimecially for those who would otherwise be left behind.

Q: Why would these programs be proposed for elimination?

A: The Trump administration’s proposed budget for FY2026 eliminates both programs, citing “efficiency” and the notion that education decisions are best left to states. But this reasoning erases the historical and systemic inequities that made these programs necessary in the first place.

From a social justice education lens, the proposed cuts are not benign. They’re a redistribution of resources away from those with the least structural access. Emerging bilinguals and migrant students already face exclusionary testing practices, English-only policies, and under-resourced schools. Removing these programs compounds the inequities. In the case of migrant educational programs, a major benefit of the federal focus was the ability to work across states to establish communication and support for students and families who have to move to follow the seasonal agricultural industry across states.

Although Congress passed a continuing resolution funding education through FY2025, the Trump administration has withheld more than [\\$6.8 billion in federal education grants](#), including Title III-A and Migrant Education Program allocations, as of July 1, 2025. This pause jeopardizes summer programs, staffing, and planning for the upcoming academic year. The administration frames this as a review. But for families and schools, the consequences are immediate and harmful.

Q: What is the status of these programs currently?

A: These funds are approved and allocated by the US Congress. While Congress has not made any regulatory changes, the President has currently frozen \$6-7 billion in education funding that was expected to be dispersed to eligible recipients by June 30, 2025. As of this

writing, most funds are still frozen, though a few projects have been notified that their funding will be released in the near future. In addition, both Title III (Language Instruction for English Learners) and Title I-C (Migrant Education Program) were targeted for elimination in the [Trump Administration's FY 2026 budget proposal](#).

Given this budget proposal and the ongoing uncertainty around the congressionally approved, but currently withheld funds, the future of federal support for multilingual learners, migrant youth, and underserved communities is in jeopardy. Without renewed commitment, the educational opportunities that have long supported academic success and upward mobility for generations are at serious risk.

There is also concern that these programs may be shifted to the states to fund and manage. This would not only strain state budgets already absorbing other federal responsibilities but would make these programs optional. Many states may simply opt out, citing costs and lack of federal support, further deepening inequities across the country.

Q: What does the research say?

A: The research is clear that the benefits of these programs over their decades of existence include benefits to the individual and families who have participated in said programs, benefits to states and communities, and benefits to the nation.

At the individual level, studies confirm that:

- Comprehensive language instruction programs combined with culturally responsive family engagement significantly improves English learner outcomes with regard to language acquisition and academic outcomes, especially when grounded in students' lived experiences and identities ([Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2022](#); [WIDA, 2023](#)).
- Migrant youth who participate in MEP programs, including summer academies, health supports, and high school equivalency pathways—are more likely to persist in school, graduate, and transition successfully into postsecondary education or workforce programs ([Nieto, Escamilla, Almanza, Hogan & Rodriguez, 2023](#); [U.S. Department of Education, 2024](#)).
- Dual language and bilingual education programs accelerate reclassification, deepen literacy, and promote academic achievement for all students, especially emerging bilinguals, while also fostering stronger multilingual identities and cross-cultural competencies ([Valentino & Reardon, 2015](#); [Umansky & Reardon, 2014](#); [Lindholm-Leary, 2020](#)).
- Bilingually educated students have greater cognitive flexibility, working memory, and executive functioning ([Bialystok, 2001](#)).
- Bilingually educated and raised students have more cohesive family relations and fewer behavior problems in school ([Portes & Hao, 2002](#)); students who maintain their bilingualism into high school are more likely to go to four-year colleges ([Santibañez & Zárate, 2014](#)) and are less likely to drop out ([Rumbaut, 2014](#)).

- Sociocultural and community-based frameworks, such as Funds of Knowledge and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, demonstrate that students bring rich cultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources from their homes and communities ([Moll et al., 1992](#); [Paris & Alim, 2017](#)). Rather than treating students as needing remediation, these frameworks guide educators to build upon students' knowledge systems, centering dignity and agency.

At the community level, studies confirm that:

- Youth leadership opportunities within immigrant rights and education equity movements, often fostered through school-based and community programs, create pathways for civic engagement and strengthen intergenerational community ties, particularly among multilingual and undocumented families ([Terriquez, 2015](#)).
- Bilingual education provides individuals and families with the language skills to access information, express their opinions, and participate fully in democratic processes thereby empowering citizens ([Seal of Biliteracy, 2023](#)).
- By supporting linguistic diversity and ensuring equitable access to education, bilingual education promotes social justice and equity within communities ([Garcia & Wei, 2014](#)).

At the national level, studies confirm that:

- A well educated work force, particularly one that is bilingual, biliterate and socially-culturally competent, enhances the ability of the United States to be globally competitive ([Gándara & Hopkins, 2010](#)). As examples, over the past few years, demand for bilingual workers in the United States more than doubled. In 2010, there were roughly **240,000** job postings aimed at bilingual workers; by 2015, that figure had ballooned to approximately **630,000**. Employers seek bilingual workers for both low- and high-skilled positions. In 2015, 60 percent of the jobs with the highest demand for bilingual workers were open to individuals with less than a bachelor's degree. Meanwhile, the fastest growth in bilingual listings from **2010 to 2015 was for so-called "high prestige"** jobs, a category including financial managers, editors, and industrial engineers.

Bilingually educated students are important in supporting local and international business: Bilingual employees can help businesses expand into new markets, serve diverse customer bases, and navigate international collaborations.

Q: What would be the impact of eliminating these programs?

A: Eliminating these programs would:

- Strip schools of critical infrastructure for linguistic and cultural inclusion.
- Impede critical efforts of school districts and universities from preparing teachers that are sorely needed to meet the chronic shortage of fully prepared teachers of emergent bilingual learners.

- Disconnect families from engagement practices that are grounded in trust and relational care.
- Disregard the sociopolitical contexts, poverty, mobility, racialization, that shape the educational experiences of emerging bilinguals and migrant students.
- Send a dangerous message: that multilingualism is expendable, and mobility or immigrant status is a disqualifier for public investment.

Without these supports, schools may return to subtractive models, pressuring students to shed their languages and identities to succeed. In the worst-case scenario, districts may return to the outdated and disproven models of instruction for students known as “sink or swim” when no support for language learning in any form was provided to help students learn English and access content.

The proposed elimination of Title III-A and the Migrant Education Program is not just a budgetary decision, but a political and moral one. These programs are rooted in a vision of educational justice, born from decades of struggle, community organizing, and policy shaped by the belief that students are not empty vessels, but carriers of knowledge, culture, and strength.

To truly center equity in education, we must defend these programs as part of a broader commitment that upholds every child’s right to belong, to learn, and to thrive without having to abandon who they are.

NEPC Resources on Immigration

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