Summary of Testimony of John D. Perry
Executive Director of the Interstate Migrant Education Council (IMEC)
on the
Education of Migratory Children
Part C of Title I of the Elementary and
Secondary School Act

Mr, Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Education of Migratory Children which is Part C of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

My name is John Perry. I am the executive director of the Interstate Migrant Education Council (IMEC) which is a consortium of seventeen states who advocate on behalf of migrant students. IMEC is a bipartisan group that includes state education board members, state legislators, local superintendents, state migrant education directors, other education agency personnel and parents of migrant students. We have the good fortune to have Congressman Bill Goodling as our National Honorary Chair.

During the last three years IMEC has examined the implementation of the Improving America's School Act (IASA) and how it has affected the education of migrant students. In January 1997 Congressman Goodling spoke to National Forum on Migrant Children and Youth. At that time you encouraged us to provide you recommendations on what works and what needs to be improved in IASA. The written testimony I have enclosed are the positions IMEC has taken. The recommendations are in the form of a series of fact sheets which summarize the background of each issue and our recommendations. I have also submitted today, to the chairman, specific statutory language to amend the current law.

A very strong recommendation we make, that is not a change in the statute, is that the Migrant Education Program should remain a federal categorical program administered by state education agencies. Migrant students are truly

the nation's students for whom local school districts often do not feel responsible. Under the aegis of the federal government, state and local migrant education program personnel have developed means of interstate cooperation to serve migrants. Without the federal government, these cooperative efforts would be diminished.

Through state administration there is the flexibility to meet the changing needs of migrant students and communities in the state. States are able, on an annual basis, to determine the number of students and the locations of students most in need of services so that financial and technical resources may be provided. This topic is discussed in more detail in the first fact sheet I have submitted.

We believe IASA is good legislation. The provisions relating to flexibility, coordination and high academic standards should benefit migrant students. Prior to IASA, migrant students were excluded from many programs in schools. The new law requires inclusion, however, much work has to be done before inclusion of migrant students becomes a universal reality.

We do not propose major changes in the law. We do not want Migrant Education to be isolated from other programs or have any situation that perpetuates discrimination against migrant students or creates barriers to full access to other services within the school. Concurrently, we want to ensure that when educators, especially those who are not migrant educators, are designing and implementing general programs, the needs of migrant students are met. Therefore, the changes we propose are to adjust the balance between flexibility in IASA and the unique needs of migrant students.

Ten Changes In I.A.S.A.

The ten changes we propose in I.A.S.A. are organized into three areas: Challenges to Flexibility, Improving Migrant Student Achievement and Administration of the Program.

Challenges to Flexibility

The first four recommendations that we believe will keep the flexibility of IASA, but will ensure that the unique needs of migrant students are met.

1. Consolidated Planning Process

   There is concern that in some states the Migrant Education Program is not included in the development of consolidated plans, but instead, the program director is requested to sign-off on the plan after it has been developed.

   Therefore, we recommend that the law should require that in the consolidated planning process, states should provide assurances that the SEA administrator of each of the covered programs has been involved in the design of the plan.

2. Schoolwide Projects

   Schoolwide projects are a major concern because an increasing number of migrant students are in schoolwide projects. Through thirty years of experience, the state migrant education programs have developed services that meet the unique needs of migrant students. There is no guarantee that these valuable services will continue when migrant students are served in schoolwide projects.

   To correct this potential void, we recommend that in local schoolwide applications the specific needs of migrant students should be stated along with a strategy to meet each need.

3. Transfer of Student Records

   There needs to be federal leadership in the transfer of records. States working independently and in ad hoc consortia have not been

able to implement a means of effective transfer of records on an interstate basis nor have they been able to agree on a minimum data set.

Therefore, we recommend that Congress should require the Secretary of Education establish minimum data elements for the timely transfer of student records whenever federal funds are used for this purpose.

4. Data Collection By States

Last year IMEC attempted to survey states on migrant student achievement, but we found very little solid data.

Therefore, we recommend that when states develop standards and an assessment system they be required to include evaluation of programs and services for migrant students. Also, state and local assessments must have test data disaggregated for migrant students.

Improving Migrant Student Achievement

State migrant education programs are concentrating on raising migrant student achievement, but we believe federal law needs to be changed in the following areas to help us in this regard. These changes are in our proposed recommendations numbers 5, 6, 7, 8.

5. Parent and Family Involvement

Migrant educators understand that parents are the one constant in the ever-changing life of migrant students. Regardless of the positive attitude of migrant educators toward parents, migrant education is largely dependent on the policies of local school officials and local Title I staff to have migrant parents involved.

We recommend four changes:

1) There should be specific parental involvement activities for migrant parents similar to current provisions in Title I.

2) There should be a one percent set-aside for parent involvement similar to current provisions in Title I.

3) Current regulations about migrant parents in schoolwide projects should be put into statute

4) There should be a formal procedure for parents to give advice at the federal level.

Family Literacy

Family literacy services should receive a higher priority in law than at present. The goal should be to increase Even Start type services. Funds should be made available to each state migrant education program to coordinate family literacy services. These funds can be dedicated from current appropriations for coordination incentive grants.

6. Technology

More than any other education service, activity or intervention, technology has the potential of permitting migrant students to overcome obstacles in their educational process.

Funds for technology programs for migrant students should be provided on a non-competitive basis, rather than the current competitive basis. Each state, or consortium of states, that meet standards and criteria established by U.S.E.D. should be able to obtain funds. U.S.E.D. should provide technical assistance to help

states prepare applications for grants.

7. Federal Technical Assistance

Migrant education should receive separate funding for technical assistance that meets the unique needs of the program. The migrant education program is different from other programs due to the demographics of the migrant population, the movement of migrant families among states and the interstate relationships among sending and receiving states.

Administration Of The Program

The last two recommendations relate to program administration.

8. Coordination of Federal Programs Serving Migrants

More comprehensive language on coordination should be put into law. The secretaries of departments serving the migrant population should be required to conduct a study and report on barriers to coordination and recommend strategies to over-come the barriers.

9. Funding Formula

The funding formula should remain essentially the same as it is under current law. The provision in current law for an incentive for states to sponsor summer programs is extraordinarily important. This incentive encourages states to provide continuity in children's education during the summer while families are working and traveling.