

“Transnational Students”
The Children of Migrants in Rural Junior High Schools in Morelos, Mexico

By Kelly A. Turner

Telesecundarias are Junior High Schools in rural communities that serve 7th, 8th and 9th graders. These schools range in size from 9 to 60 students. Each grade is taught in a self contained classroom. Their teacher is responsible for the entire curriculum, including the three hours per week of English as a Foreign Language mandated by the federal government. Each subject is supported by a 15 minute video segment per day, thus the term, “Tele”secundaria, or “Television Junior High”. None of these teachers are foreign language specialists, and most of them speak little or no English. I worked for two weeks in Jojutla, Morelos, designing lessons that modeled good instructional practices for foreign languages, while simultaneously providing English instruction for the teachers themselves.

In June of 2009 as a participant in a PROBEM sponsored teacher exchange program I had the opportunity to visit several Telesecundarías and observe the operations of PROBEM (Programa Binacional Estados Unidos y México), located in the offices of the Secretaría de Educación Básica de Morelos. It was there where I first noticed the phenomenon of students with years of educational experience in the public schools of the United States, many of them American citizens, enrolling in public schools in Mexico. The number of students returning to Mexico has increased over the past two years due to the sharp decline in employment opportunities and an increasing hostile climate towards immigration. In December of the 2009, in Morelos alone, school principals reported 524 migrant students attending Mexican schools in grades Kindergarten through nine. Of

these students, 412 were American citizens and an additional 19 held dual citizenship.
(PROBEM Statistics)

In June of 2010 I conducted a small case study of transnational students and the educational experiences they encounter in Mexico. I visited two Telesecundarías and interviewed 11 students, two principals, one teacher, and a set of parents. I interviewed PROBEM staff, who provided me with statistics and graphs and a copy of a report completed in December 2009 regarding the educational needs of migrant children in the State of Morelos. In this paper I will provide a description of Mexico's public educational system and the role of PROBEM, report the comments made by teachers and administrators regarding the needs and characteristics of transnational students, and provide a summary of the interviews of the 11 students.

A free public education is provided to students overseen by the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (SEP) in Mexico City. In addition to funding schools SEP establishes criteria for teacher training, licensure and salaries; writes the national curriculum; chooses and provides the textbooks; and oversees the three types of standardized national exams administered each spring. Compulsory education includes kindergarten through 9th grades. It is referred to as *Educación Básica* (Basic Education) and consists of two parts, pre-school and *Primaria* (Primary), grades K-6, and *Secundaria* (Junior High School) which corresponds to grades seven through nine in the United States. There are two kinds of secundarias: *Generales* (general junior high schools) and *Técnicas* (technical schools).

The basic academic requirements for a diploma certifying the successful completion of *Secundaria* are set by SEP. Schools must provide these core classes and

are allowed to add complementary subjects. Both *Secundarias Generales* and *Técnicas* include a vocational component consisting of “talleres” or labs, which include computers, keyboarding, sewing, electricity, knitting, and other skills. In each of the three years of *Secundaria*, students study the following every week:

Required Core Classes for *Técnicas* and *Generales*

HOURS PER WEEK	SUBJECT
6 (both)	Math
6 (both)	Spanish
6 (both)	Science
4 (both)	Social Studies (History of Mexico, Geography and Civics)
3 (both)	Foreign Language (French or English)
3 (both)	Physical Education
2 (both)	Fine Arts (Music, Theatre, Plastic Arts)
4 <i>Generales</i>	Vocational Studies
8 <i>Técnicas</i>	Vocational Studies

In Mexico high school (grades 10-12, called *Preparatoria* or *Bachillerato*) is optional. Students may choose from three plans of study, *Preparatorías Generales*, *Bachilleratos Técnicas* and *Bachilleratos Abiertos a Distancia*. *Generales* and *Técnicas* have the same academic requirements, and graduates of both modalities are eligible for university studies. The difference is that graduates of the *Técnicas* spend an additional four hours per school day in vocational classes and in addition to a high school diploma, they receive a certification in a specific trade (such as electricians, mechanics, animal husbandry, food preparation and preservation, pharmacy and laboratory technicians and computer specialists.) *Bachilleratos Abiertos* are provided via the internet and allow students to complete their high school credits while living in rural areas.

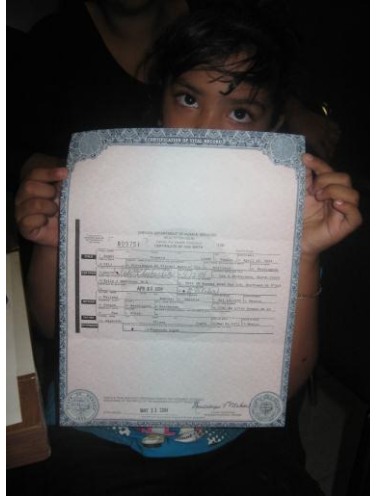
Evaluation and Promotion in Mexico

The mechanisms for testing and promotion of students are determined by law and are designed and administered by SEP. Beginning in second grade, students must pass all of their subjects to be promoted to the next grade. However, up to four failed subjects may be substituted with a passing grade on a proficiency test, called the *examen extraordinario*. Students may take this exam three times. If they fail to pass the exam the third time, they must repeat the school year. If a student fails a grade a second time they enroll in a special class, called *Programas Extraordinarias*, special programs in which a teacher helps students meet the requirements in Math and Spanish for two grade levels in a single academic year.

There are three types of national exams administered in Mexico. *The Examen de Enlace* (Comprehensive Achievement Exam) is given each April to all students beginning in the third grade and continuing until the last semester of Bachillerato. This test measures achievement in Spanish, Mathematics, Science, and one additional core subject, which varies from year to year. For example History may be measured one year, and foreign language in another. The results from this exam are available in August so that the data will be available at the start of the school year in September. The second national exam is the *Examen de Escala* (Leveling Exam), which is given to a representative sample of students from each state. The third test is *the Examen de Carrera Maestrial* (Professional Teaching Exam) given each June to the students of eligible teachers. This exam is a method of evaluating teachers and is the only vehicle which allows them to receive pay increases based on years of experience and levels of education and professional development. To be eligible to participate teachers must work

a minimum of 19 hours per week. *Secundaria* and *Bachillerato* teachers work by the hour and many of them do not meet this minimum requirement for participation in the *Carerra Maesterial*, and cannot receive pay increases based on length of service or education.

PROBEM (Bi-national Migrant Education Program)



1Five year old United States citizen, a former Beaverton, Oregon resident, accompanies her mother to the Cuernavaca PROBEM office.

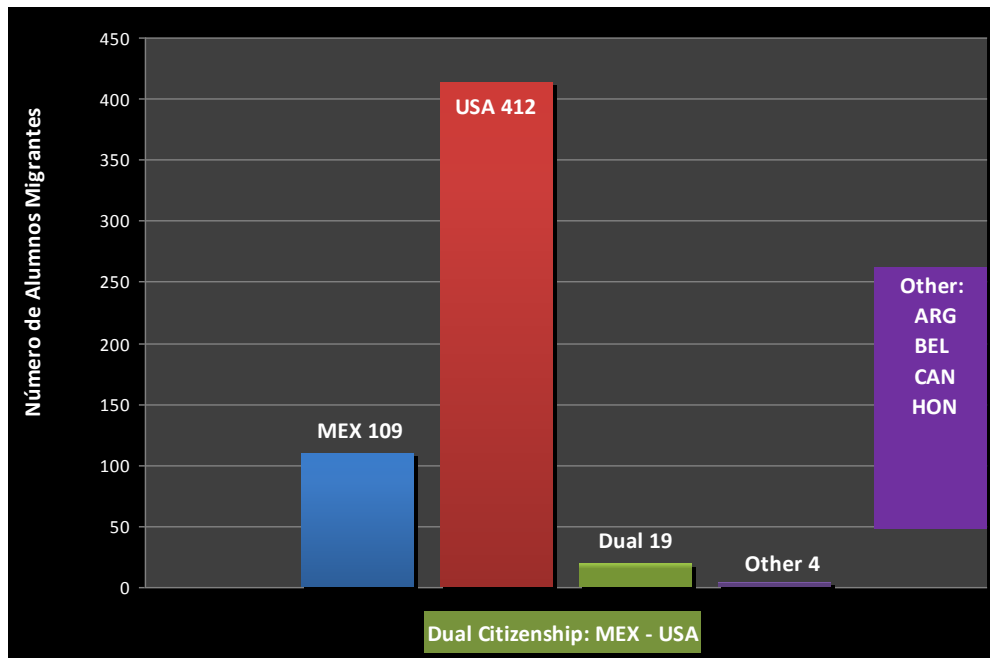
PROBEM *Programa Binacional de Educación Migrante* is a national program under the direction of two federal secretaries, The Secretary of Education and the Secretary of International Relations. These two secretaries collaborate to guarantee access to education to students who return to Mexico after living in the United States. There are two primary functions of this office. First, it encourages and oversees study abroad programs for high school and college students. Second, it enables students returning to Mexico after living and studying in the United States to complete their basic education, grades one through nine, and to continue studying at the high school and college level.

There are two federally appointed Heads of PROBEM. Within the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (National Secretary of Public Education), the *Dirección General de Relaciones Internacionales* (The National Directorate of International Relations) negotiates and signs agreements with other countries regarding education. Within SIR, the *Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior* (The Institute of Mexicans Abroad) works with Mexican communities residing in the United States via the consulates established in each state. *Plazas Comunitarias* (Community Education Centers) in American communities are the responsibility of this department.

All 31 Mexican states have a representative of PROBEM in the state educational offices located in their capitals. This person carries out the four directives of the national office (to be detailed ahead) and deals with educational issues between the United States and Mexico. In some states this person has administrative powers and can make directives, and in others he/she has coordinative functions only and may not establish policy. In Morelos, the state where I worked, the PROBEM offices have coordinative functions only, although its administrator has been given some limited directive powers, such as the creation and administration of professional development for teachers and principals. The only PROBEM office in Morelos is located in the Offices of Basic Education K-9 in Cuernavaca.

The primary directive of PROBEM's state offices is to ensure that students returning to Mexico from the United States have immediate access to basic education K-9 and enroll in their local primary or secondary school. The laws make this easy to accomplish for compulsory education, grades K – 9.

524 Total Migrant Students
Reported in by principals to be attending *Primaria* or *Secundaria* in Morelos during the 2009-10 school year. PROBEM of Morelos Compiled the Data in March of 2010.



Yoloxochitl Brito Cantú, the coordinator of PROBEM in Morelos commented, “Every day we receive families returning from the United States who are applying to enroll their children in school. This can happen at any time during the academic year. It is more difficult when students return in May in June without having completed the school year in the United States because Mexico is also awarding credits and giving grades and exams at this time. It is unreasonable to expect these students to be evaluated according to the Mexican curriculum when they have not participated in the activities of the year. We have several options. Sometimes we give them credit for the school year they were completing in their last school in the US, and don’t require them to attend school until the new academic year begins in September. If a student’s grades were inadequate, or their credentials incomplete, we may ask them to take a placement exam. But we try to avoid giving them an exam that tests curriculum they have not been prepared for. We rarely are forced to have them repeat a grade.”

A daily task in the PROBEM offices involves contacting school districts in the United States and requesting records. Brito noted that “sometimes families are deported and do not have time to obtain records. Other parents have limited education and are not familiar with the need to comply with the paper work procedures in Mexico.”

The second directive of PROBEM is to inform the community and parents of the right their children have to a basic education. PROBEM’s staff coordinates informative presentations at municipal meetings in local communities where immigration to the United States has a strong tradition. These meetings include information about all services available to returning immigrants, including educational, social and health services.

The third PROBEM directive is to coordinate the international teacher exchanges. Mexican teachers can travel to the United States to work in summer schools provided by migrant education. They work with children whose parents are Mexican or who are themselves Mexican citizens born in Mexico, and then taken as small children to the United States. Brito notes that “they are legally Mexican but they don’t know anything about Mexico, its history or its culture.” PROBEM also receives American teachers who are invited to lead workshops about the instruction of foreign languages.

The fourth directive of PROBEM is to provide professional development for teachers and administrators. Recently this has included workshops training teachers to effectively teach Spanish literacy skills to students who have been educated primarily in English in the United States. According to Brito, “There are a large number of students returning to Mexico who have received their education only in English. They know how to speak Spanish because they speak it with their parents at home, but they don’t know

how to read or write Spanish. The purpose of these workshops is to provide tools to teachers to enable them more quickly help the students to learn to read and write in Spanish.” Trainings are also provided for principals to familiarize them with the regulations and paperwork associated with matriculating migrant students, answering questions such as how and what must be done to them so that they can be correctly placed in the proper grade as quickly as possible and working to sensitize administrators to the special needs of migrant children and families.

Validación de Estudios: Transfer of educational credits acquired in the United States

PROBEM is authorized to provide students with a certificate of recognition of the education completed in the United States which can be used for the same purposes as diplomas and transcripts earned in Mexico. Because Mexican law requires that all residents of Mexico have access to *Educación Básica* (Kindergarten – 9th grade) the procedures are simple for the *Primaria* and *Secundaria* level. Schools are required to enroll these students immediately and the parents or principal may complete the paperwork to acquire a *Validación de Estudios* in the PROBEM office in the state capital afterwards. A birth certificate, from Mexico or the United States, and the most recent copy of the student’s report card is all that is required. This report card need not be official, and can simply consist of the progress report sent home at the end of the most recent grading period.

The procedures are more complicated for grades ten, eleven and twelve, because although Mexico provides free public high schools to its residents, participation is not obligatory. Consequently, the state is not required to provide a *Bachillerato/Preparatoria* education to every resident. Students must successfully

complete *Secundaria* and receive a passing grade on an entrance exam to be admitted to *Preparatorías/Bachilleratos*. The procedures to obtain a validation of studies for tenth through twelfth grade fall under the provisions of international agreements signed and recognized by both the United States and Mexico. The *Convenio de la Haya* states that education acquired outside of Mexico be recognized but transcripts and diplomas must have an apostille or authentication. In Oregon to obtain an apostille, the official transcript must first be notarized by an official of the school district. The student must then send the notarized transcript and a ten dollar fee to the Secretary of State in Salem, who will authenticate the notarization (see <http://www.sos.state.or.us/corporation/notary/howtoauth.htm#diploma> for details).

Mexico requires that the apostille and transcript be translated into Spanish by authorized translators. This may be prohibitively expensive for the student who returns to Mexico with little or no financial resources. When school districts are able to generate Spanish copies of the transcript and notarize them, it will make it much easier for students to have access to High School and College educations in Mexico. These steps are essential if a student is to receive credit for education received in the United States beyond the ninth grade. If a student can not provide an apostilled, translated copy of their transcripts and/or high school diploma to the PROBEM offices in Mexico, they will not receive credit for work they completed in the United States and will have to repeat the three years of Preparatoría in Mexico.

Part II: The Educators and Students

What follows are narratives taken from the transcripts of interviews of two principals, one teacher, and 10 students.

Ramón Soto García
Principal of Telesecundaria Hermanos Flores Magón, Comunidad de Casahuatlan,
Morelos, México



What are the characteristics of students returning from the USA to your school?

“In this school the number of students returning from the United States has not increased dramatically, we receive an average of two or three students arriving each academic year. We don’t have the infrastructure or teacher preparation to adequately serve students of this type. They arrive talking English very well. The curriculum in the United States is very different from what we have here. When the students come accustomed to another methodology it takes them some time to adapt to the situation in Mexico. These students arrive not able to read or write in Spanish. We turn to the child’s teacher who little by little teaches them the conventions and rules of Spanish. Through daily practice and support from their teacher and classmates they begin to learn. They don’t dominate Spanish as well as their peers, but they can participate in class and do the work given to them by their teachers.”

What would be the most effective strategy to support the academic success of United States citizens in your schools? “The majority of our students receive direct financial support, “Becas de Oportunidades” (Opportunity Scholarships) from the Mexican federal

government. Direct financial support of families does not effectively improve educational opportunities. The support would be most effective if it were used to improve the infrastructure of the school, by providing libraries and internet access for all students and teachers. Currently no one in this school, including myself, has access to the internet. The telephone is connected, but we can only receive calls. To call out we must use a calling card paid for with our personal funds. I would like a well stocked library that included reading material of interest to the students. We are given books each year, but they are not enough. I need maintenance and materials for a science and computer laboratory. I have computer programs for science and math, but no modern computers which would allow students access to these materials in their classrooms.”

What is the biggest obstacle your students face?

“Hunger and trauma are the primary problems for all the children, migrant and otherwise. Many children come to my office complaining of head aches. I ask them if they had eaten breakfast, and they reply no. I ask what they had for dinner, and the response is the same. All I have to give them is a hard candy to suck on, in the hopes it will be enough to raise their blood sugar. I have consulted a doctor about the head aches, and he said they are due to hunger, and could be resolved with food. I am concerned about the quality of food available to my students. A mother comes each day to sell sandwiches to the children. She charges eight pesos (one dollar). Many of the kids do not have enough funds to buy one, so with what they have they buy *cheetos*, an empty calorie.

Some children with American citizenship are abandoned. They live with grandmothers who can barely walk. How can such an old women address the needs of an

adolescent? Others live with relatives who are not sufficiently concerned with their welfare. They are left behind; their fathers and mothers working in the United States forget about them and create new families. These children are left alone, “hijos de nadie,” the children of no one.”

Edgar, Principal
Daysi Sarai Gómez Manzanarez, teacher, of Telesecundaría Constitución de 1917
Comunidad de Teacalco, Morelos, México.



Edgar, 36, is the director of a small Telesecundaría (rural Junior High) ten miles from Taxco and an hour and a half from Cuernavaca. In addition to serving as the school's principal he teaches the ninth grade and substitutes for the pregnant teacher of the sixth grade. Daysi Gomez Manzanarez, a student in my workshop workshop, is responsible for the seventh grade.

When Edgar was 12 his father died and his mother immigrated to the United States, leaving him with relatives. The money she sent him from wages she received at Disney World made it possible for Edgar to continue studying until he completed the requirements for a teaching license at the University. For the first decade she lived in the United States she was able to return every few years to visit Edgar. Health problems have prevented her from leaving the United States, and she maintains contact with Edgar and her two grandsons, four and seven, via the telephone and internet.

Edgar observed that students who arrive from American schools are unfamiliar with Mexican culture and history. At first they often refuse to salute the Mexican flag or sing its anthem. He finds that many of them plan on returning to the United States eventually, and that the five students I interviewed speak English among themselves, in an attempt to maintain their fluency.

Daysi, Laura, and I arrived at the school as the students and Edgar finished cleaning the rooms and school grounds. We were introduced to each of the three classrooms, and I was asked to give a short English lesson. Edgar made his office available to me to comfortably interview the five transnational students. As I questioned the children, we could hear music as Daysi's class practiced folk dances for an upcoming event. Sound of burros could be heard as men passed the school on their way to the corn fields outside of town. Lunch was served at the end of the day. A husband and wife sold burritos filled with egg, cheese and greens for 5 pesos. These parents were granted permission from the principal to sell lunches. They told me that they used the profits to pay for the costs associated with their children's high school and college educations. One of their children is a teacher, another will graduate soon, and two others are still studying.



At the end of the school day, Laura and I waited on the steps of the school for Daysi and Edgar to complete their work day. Three of the young women I had

interviewed stayed and talked in English about their experiences. Much of their conversation was about boys, and who was dating whom, and was Maria dating their 21 year old soccer coach. Two of the girls made plans to go swimming in the irrigation ditch after school. After a while, the conversation turned to the trip they made from United States back to their pueblo. All of the girls' parents had minimized the cost of the trip by having their children take ground transportation from Chicago or California to Tijuana. From Tijuana they took airplanes to Mexico City. There, uncles picked them up and they traveled by bus to Cuernavaca. Finally, they rode in taxis to their village, miles from where they had begun. Some of the girls made the trip alone. One was accompanied by her sister and mother. They all recalled that the trip took from three days to a week.

The Students of Telesecundaría Constitución de 1917

Yamilet, 14, Mexican Citizen



Daysi Saria Gomez, 26, a seventh grade teacher, was eager for me to interview her regarding Yamilet, a student who returned to Mexico six months ago, on November 27th, 2009, just before her fourteenth birthday. “Yami is a very intelligent girl who

doesn't find learning difficult. However, when she reads texts she doesn't understand some of the words, so she copies them down just like she sees them in the book. She has the most difficulty understanding the principal ideas of the text. I ask her to read the text three times, then underline what she thinks is important. She often becomes frustrated and stops working, complaining that she doesn't understand Spanish. I have tried to support her by seating her next to one of my brightest students. She helps Yami with her Spanish and Yami helps her with her English. Yami reads and writes English very well. She is behind in Math, but is able to keep up with the instruction as the material is new to everyone. The subjects she has the most difficulty with are History of Morelos and Geography.”

Yami, accompanied by her sister and her mother, returned to Mexico to escape bad influences in California. Her father remained in the United States and sends money to support his family and to continue building their home. Daysi continued, “Yami's behavior has improved in Mexico, since there is less freedom for children here. I remind Yami that her parents love her so much that they live apart in order to save her. Yami sometimes complains that our Mexican school doesn't have gym classes or a pool. I reply, “The school is small, and it is dependent on you to make it big. Love your family; don't put your friends first. It is in your hands, your success or failure.”

Yami was born in Mexico in 1995 and left for the United States when she was three years old. She and her family lived in the Bay Area, where she attended elementary and middle school in Saliva. She was in the eighth grade at Sunnyvale Middle School when she left for Mexico in November. My interview of Yami was conducted in English.

“When I was in the sixth or seventh grade I started getting out of control. I was hanging out with the wrong people, ditching school, and there was a point at which I started smoking. My school helped me out a lot, and found me counseling. I felt there was too much pressure “over there” and I was afraid I wouldn’t be strong enough to resist it. I asked my mother if we could go back to Mexico. I had never been here. I wanted to know what it was like.”

It was hard for Yami to adapt to Mexico. “I have to speak Spanish every day; I was not used to it. In California my friends spoke Spanish, but we always spoke English to each other. It is hard walking everywhere. Around here barely any people own their own cars. I was used to being in my car with dad all the time. Over there I would like something in the store and my mother would buy it for me. Here it is different. There are no stores, if you want to buy something you have to go to Puente, even for grocery shopping. With three in my family, we each have to pay 14 pesos to get there and 14 pesos to return. I live next to my grandma, which is weird because I’m not used to it. She wants us to sleep over and she wants to hang out with us and go swimming in the river. Over there I was the youngest of my friends, here I am the oldest. I’m used to different things than them, but its fun, I learn from them and they learn from me.”

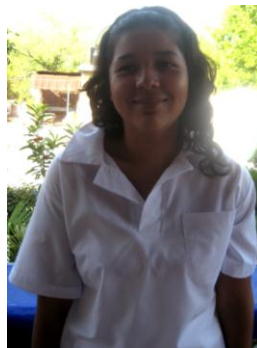
“They have a different teaching style here. We write more, I have filled up two notebooks for each class. The teachers give directions and then we write summaries of what we read, define the words we have never seen, and we do the activities the book asks us to do. We watch lessons on television. They are about five minutes long. The math segment is helpful, because it’s easier to understand than the book instruction since it moves the lines around on the graph. I can read Spanish, but not that well. When you

ask me what it (the reading) was about I can't tell you because I don't understand all the words. Also, I can't really write it (Spanish). It hasn't gotten easier in the last six months."

"I don't plan on returning to the United States for now. I want to go back, but my dad said no. I want to finish studying here. I want to be an English teacher. All my dad wants is for me to go to school."

Yamilet's mother provided a lunch for us to share with Daysi, Edgar, and Yamilet at the end of the day. We were also invited to her home, where her mother showed me what the money her husband had earned in California had provided. It was a two bedroom, single bath home with a front room that served as a living room, dining room and kitchen. The entire house was covered in new blue tile. On the wall were two awards earned by Yami's father from his employer: "Presented to Salvador S. in Recognition of Outstanding Service."

Porola, 15, United States Citizen



Porola was born in Laguna Hills, California. Her parents returned to Mexico soon after she was born. She returned to the United States when she was three years old. She began studying at Telesecundaría Constitución de 1917 on January 9, 2009. My interview of Porola was conducted entirely in English.

“My parents used to leave and come a lot. A few years ago my parents separated and my dad returned to Mexico. We stayed with our mom. My dad died three years ago. My mom went back to Kent, Washington and left me with my aunt. My brother left for the United States last Monday. I have an 18 year old sister, a nine year old brother and a fourteen year old brother living with my mom. Practically, I am here by myself.”

“The last school I attended was Franklin Pierce High School in Tacoma, Washington. I was in the ninth grade. My grades were really bad at first, except in Spanish. I had a 2.6. But my mom promised that I could go to Mexico if my grades got better. So, I had a 3.1 when I left, mostly A’s and B’s and one C.”

“I’m going alright with my studies. In the United States I only spoke Spanish with my mom, because my sister speaks English. It’s weird for us to speak Spanish. I do “ok” in writing Spanish, I’m really good at writing. I spell alright in Spanish. Sometimes with the big words I do get confused, or with the names of the pueblos (towns). Geography, that’s alright. Math is the hardest one, because they put numbers and letters together. How does that work?”

“I like it here, its better. I like my family a lot, sometimes on weekends we get together, have lunch together, I really like that. Over there, I didn’t do anything. I played on the computer, watched TV, its boring. Here I have something to do. I’m studying for cutting hair, dying it, because she (my aunt) has a daughter that is a teacher for that. I’m also in a dance group, we dance Mexican music, and we are making a costume that looks like a goat. Today we’re going to perform in another pueblo.”

“I don’t know how my aunt stands me. She says, “Oh, it’s because I care about you.” She talks to me, giving me advice. I was used to living with my mom, doing what

ever I wanted. My uncles give me advice. I didn't want to study. I hated going to school, so they gave me an example. All of my uncles work and work to get money to live each day. If they don't work, they don't have money. Only one of my uncles studied, and he's a teacher. All he has to do is teach. He gets vacations and my other uncles never have a day off. And they told me to look at the car he drives, he has a nice car. I was like, oh yeah, what am I going to do in 15 years if I don't study? They told me that was what they were trying to say. Next year I am going to Bachilleres (High School), going to start to study Pedagogy and Languages. I want to be a teacher. I want to be an English teacher."

Maria, 15, United States Citizen

Maria was born in Chicago, Illinois. She was two when she moved to Mexico for the first time. She was six when her family returned to Chicago. She spent six years in Chicago public schools before returning to Mexico in June of 2007 with her mother, father and brother, Roberto. They live in their own house. An aunt and grandfather live close by. Her father owns a car and works as a taxi driver. Her mother runs a small store.

"I already knew how to read and write Spanish when I came. Over there (Chicago) we had a class just for Spanish, about one hour a day. They taught us how to write, how to read." Why was it a good idea to teach you how to read Spanish in Chicago? "My mother knows only Spanish. She doesn't know English, and I wouldn't be able to talk to her. When I came here I wouldn't have known how to read and write. I started that class I think when I was in third grade. All my other subjects were in English. I had straight A's when I came here." Do you have straight A's now? "Yeah."

What could be done to support your studies in Mexico? “Give me more chances to keep studying English, so I don’t forget this language. Send(ing) more teachers that are from over there (the United States). The English they have over there is not the same, the pronunciation is kind of different (than in Mexico). We don’t have internet here.”



“There are no jobs here. It’s kind of difficult. My dad will probably go the United States soon to get work.”

Roberto, 14, United States Citizen



Roberto was born in Chicago, Illinois. He returned to Mexico in June of 2007, with his parents and his sister Maria. He was in the fifth grade at John Spray Elementary School when he left Chicago. His favorite subject was math. He does well in Math in Mexico as well. He missed his friends at first but, he didn’t miss his school. At first Spanish was hard for him. “It was hard because I didn’t know the words from here.” His grades are lower than he would like right now because he doesn’t study. He’d like to be

a soccer player. He plans to return to Chicago in a year to attend high school. He will live with his aunt. “Maybe I will study more afterwards.”

Cristal, 15, United States Citizen



Cristal was born in Chicago, Illinois. She has moved back and forth between the United States and Mexico, returning to Mexico at two, moving back to the USA at four, returning to Mexico at seven, and back to Chicago at nine. She remained in Chicago until she returned to Mexico at eleven. The last school she attended was Princeton Elementary School, in the Chicago area.

“I don’t have a Dad. He died, and I live with my mom here. I was in the fourth grade at Princeton. I wasn’t held back, I have a December birthday. When I first went to the United States I knew how to speak English, but not how to write it. I can write it now, but not that good. I was put in the fifth grade when I got back to Mexico. My grades are ok, but when I was in second (eighth grade); they came down because my dad died. He died last year. I was depressed. It was worse because he died on Valentine’s Day. He had a car accident. It happened here (in Mexico). He was a teacher. I have a little sister in the third grade. She’s really sad, my sister. She’s eight. He wasn’t really my dad, he was my step dad, but I never really had a dad. I technically loved him as a dad.”

“My grades are ok right now. I like all my classes. History, I learn about what happened in the past, what happened in Mexico. Math, that’s a little hard, but I like it, too many numbers. Spanish, I like it a bit, but I really don’t like to read, so I don’t like that. We write about books that we read. I’ve read Dracula this year. We have like 20 pages left. I like the blood. I am going to Bachillerato. I want to study to be a forensic, to open dead bodies.”

Katia, 15, Mexican Citizen



Katia was born in Zacatepac, Mexico. She lived in California from the age of three until the age of ten. She completed the fourth grade at Washington School in Santa Barbara, and started the fifth grade in Mexico. She is currently completing the ninth grade. Her two brothers, 10 and 6, both American citizens, are currently living with her parents in Santa Barbara. Her eighteen year old married sister was born in Mexico. Katia lives with her aunt and two cousins, 14 and 21.

“I never remembered the names of my teachers because there were a lot. I never remembered the names of my classmates. I have normal grades here. I’m not that bad. My favorite subject is science because we do things. I like math, but not that much. I want to teach languages, like English and French. I like to study. I will be going to Prepa (high school) in Puente.”

“When I came back (to Mexico) I didn’t know how to say things in Spanish. I couldn’t talk really well in Spanish. My family would ask me to bring them something, and I’d be like, what is that? I didn’t know. Spanish was hard in school. The teachers here gave me homework, they taught me things, showing me how to spell things, and my family helped me too.”

The Students of Telesecundaría Hermanos Flores Magón

Kayla, 14, Mexican Citizen



Kayla was four years old when she moved to Salt Lake City with her parents and sister. She lived there for nine years before returning to Mexico on September 4, 2008, after completing the sixth grade. Her two brothers, eight six are American citizens. They have forgotten most of their English and read and write only Spanish.

Kayla was “a pretty good student” at Glendale Elementary School in Salt Lake. Her favorite subjects were math and science. Her favorite teacher was Mr. Jensen. She received some ESOL services in early elementary school, but by the time she left Utah she no longer needed them. She still reads and writes English, “sometimes I confuse the words, but I can read it.” She thinks she reads at about the fourth or fifth grade level.

When Kayla returned to Mexico she didn’t know how to read or write Spanish. “I confused the letters and everything. I can read and write Spanish now. They didn’t do anything to help me learn, they just let me stay in class and I had to learn. My family

helped me. At first I got all 6's and 7's (C's and D's), but then I got better. My grades are 8's and 9's now (B's and A's), and some 10's (A+'s) too." When asked what the school could have done to ease her transition she said, "Showing me how to read. Spending time."

When asked how the Mexican government could support her education she said, "Me and my sister are going to go to Preparatoría (high school) next year and we need to pay the transportation to Puente (the closest town with a high school). It costs 100 pesos a day for two people to get there and return. I want to be a lawyer, but first I want to finish high school."

When asked why her parents returned to Mexico she said, "We wanted to see our family. My grandma was really sick, and my dad was afraid she was gonna die. That was why we came to see them. We were planning to return to the United States but now you know, the new law, that's why we don't want to go. We're really scared about that law in Arizona."

Magaleno, 13, American Citizen



The interview of Magaleno was conducted entirely in Spanish. He was born in Utah, but returned to Mexico at one year old with both of his parents. His two grown brothers remained in the United States, one in Utah the other in Chicago. He knows he is an American citizen, and he plans to return to the United States to be with his brothers and to attend high school. He wants to learn English, because he is an American, but

English is one of his most difficult subjects in school. His grades are, “regular.” His favorite subject is science because he is interested in nature. He doesn’t care for Math, but finds History, “ok.” When asked what his plans for the future were, he said he would like to be a town counsel member, like his uncle, and help people. Yoloxochitl suggested he study law.

Yoloxochitl asked Magaleno if his parents had obtained dual citizenship for him. He said they had not. She informed him that he would not be eligible to study in a Preparatoría in Mexico without them, since he is an American citizen.

Cousins: Malena 15, American Citizen and Brenda Ester 14, Mexican Citizen



Malena is finishing the third year of Secundaría, or 9th grade. She was born in Utah and returned to Mexico as an infant. The interview was conducted in Spanish. She is a dual citizen of Mexico and the United States. She lived in Salt Lake City with her brother and uncle for nine months. She was completed the second half of seventh grade and the first half of eighth grade there. During these months she learned a few simple English phrases, but she can not remember them.

School is going well for Malena in Mexico. She does her homework so that she can “get the points necessary for good grades.” Her favorite subject is computers. She

plans to return to the United States, “so that I can keep studying and have a future in life.” Before she returns she would like to complete a degree in elementary education.

Her biggest obstacle to education is her father’s reluctance to allow her to study past the ninth grade. As a dual national she is eligible to study at the high school level in both the United States and Mexico.



Brenda Ester, Malena’s cousin, is completing the second year of Secundaría, or 8th grade. Ester was born in Mexico. Her parents left for the United States with out her. Her mother sent for her when she was around three years old. She lived in Utah and in San Francisco, California. She doesn’t remember the names of the schools she attended or the teacher she had. She returned to Mexico with her mother to live with her grandmother when she was in the fifth grade. She has a married sister and nephew in California. “The only one in the family without papers is me.”

When she returned to Mexico she did “ok” in Spanish, but not history or geography because “they didn’t have it in the United States.” Ester said she misses school “more often than not” because her mom is sick. “That is why we came back to Mexico, because she is sick in the head, she has schizophrenia. We came so she could

get medical attention.” Ester works in a restaurant. “I make tortillas and some food I know how to make. I wash dishes. I miss school to earn money for my grandma so she can buy medicine for my mom. I feel I am behind in my studies, there are some things I don’t understand, since I’ve missed school.”

“Over there (in the United States) I couldn’t miss school. Here if I miss, they might say something, but not like over there where they would go look for kids in their homes. I live with my grandma and my mom. My dad doesn’t support me; he stopped supporting me when I was little.”

Elizabeth, 14, Mexican Citizen



Elizabeth moved to Utah when she was eight years old. Her father had gone ahead and sent for her, her mother, a sister, and her aunt after he was established in Utah. Her mother worked cleaning restaurants and offices. Elizabeth enrolled in the second grade. Her teacher didn’t speak Spanish, but she helped her by giving her books to read. She had a tutor once a week her taught her simple phrases. Elizabeth and her family returned to Mexico eight months ago. Her father made the decision to leave because he could not longer find work in the United States. He was spending the savings they planned on using to build a house in Mexico on food and rent. He was able to find employment in Mexico through friends. Her mother no longer works.

Elizabeth is completing the second year of Secundaría. When she first returned her Spanish was, “más o menos.” “I didn’t know how to read and write Spanish when I returned to Mexico. It was hard, and it is still difficult. I wish I could get some help to improve my reading and writing.”

History and Math were hard. “They (Mexican teachers) teach Math in another way, I was confused, both are still confusing. Over there they taught you their history, here they teach the history of Mexico. I don’t know anything about Mexican history. Over there we had a different teacher every hour. Here we only have one teacher. There they gave us food; here we have to buy our lunch. Here they sell sandwiches and *cheetos*. I missed my friends, my school. There I had a cell phone, and I talked to my friends everyday. But now they can’t talk to me because there is no work. There my brothers and I were always together. Now, my brothers stayed behind in Utah.”

Conclusion and Comments

In preparation for the workshop I led in Jojutla, Morelos I interviewed two members of the Three Rivers School District. The first, Yolanda Bruton, 60, is a former Spanish teacher at North Valley High School who shared many of the experiences of the migrant children I interviewed in Mexico. Her parents were working in Texas as part of the Bracero Program when she was born. Her grandfather died, and her father disappeared so her mother and grandmother returned to Guadalajara, Mexico. When Yolanda was two, her mother moved to California to earn money to support Yolanda and herself. She left Yolanda with her grandmother and uncle until she was able to send for her when Yolanda was nine years old. Yolanda entered public school in Compton, California in the third grade, an American citizen who spoke no English. Her teacher

didn't speak Spanish, but as Yolanda was ahead in math she gave her picture books to read while the other children were working on their math. Yolanda read and practiced until by the end of the year she had caught up with her peers. When it came time for her to enter high school she benefited from the enactment of Brown versus the Board of Education, which resulted in students from the Hispanic and black neighborhoods of Compton being bused to an affluent white neighborhood where she attended Dominguez High School. Yolanda graduated fifth in her class and was offered a full scholarship to the University of California at Berkley. Her mother refused to sign the papers, so Yolanda chose to study at Compton Community College. A counselor there helped her fill out financial aide papers and she earned a bachelor's degree at California State at Dominguez Hills. Yolanda eventually married a Vietnam veteran and moved to Grants Pass where she raised two children, became an active member of the community, church and PTA and taught at the local high school. Her educational success in the United States can be attributed to four factors; the support of her grandmother, the basic education she received in Mexico, her own motivation, and the political environment of the nineteen sixties that made high quality educational opportunities available to her. "I am very hard working. Also, my grandmother often told me, "Mi hija, I want you to get an education. With education you can do anything."

As Oregon teachers we will continue to receive students like Yolanda in our classes. Those American citizens who return with solid literacy and math skills acquired in Mexican public schools have the best chance of success in our system. These skills are transferable, and with encouragement and academic support they can acquire literacy skills in English and graduate from American high schools and attend American

universities. It is in our interest to support public education in Mexico, as we will continue to share the responsibility to educate transnational students with Mexican teachers.

The second individual I interviewed was a senior at Hidden Valley High School. Rosa (a pseudonym) 18, is a Mexican citizen who immigrated to Crescent City, California with her parents when she was in the third grade. “My parents left me in Mexico with my grandmother when I was three. They came back to get me when they realized that they were going to stay (in the United States) longer than they expected.” Unlike Yolanda, she does not have citizenship in the United States. Her two younger siblings were born in California and are American citizens. Rosa moved to Grants Pass in the eighth grade. She reported that at the start of ninth grade she was immature and earned poor grades, but by her sophomore year she realized she wished to attend college and began to apply herself in her classes. At the time of our interview, Rosa was two weeks from graduating from Hidden Valley. She approached me and asked me to find out what type of documents she needed to take with her back to Mexico where she wished to study tourism at a university. Rosa was very aware that her legal status in the United States would make it difficult to study and work here. I contacted Brito who explained the need for an apostilled official transcript accompanied by an official translation of her transcript and diploma. Brito warned that without this apostilled transcript and diploma Rosa would not be eligible to attend college in Mexico.

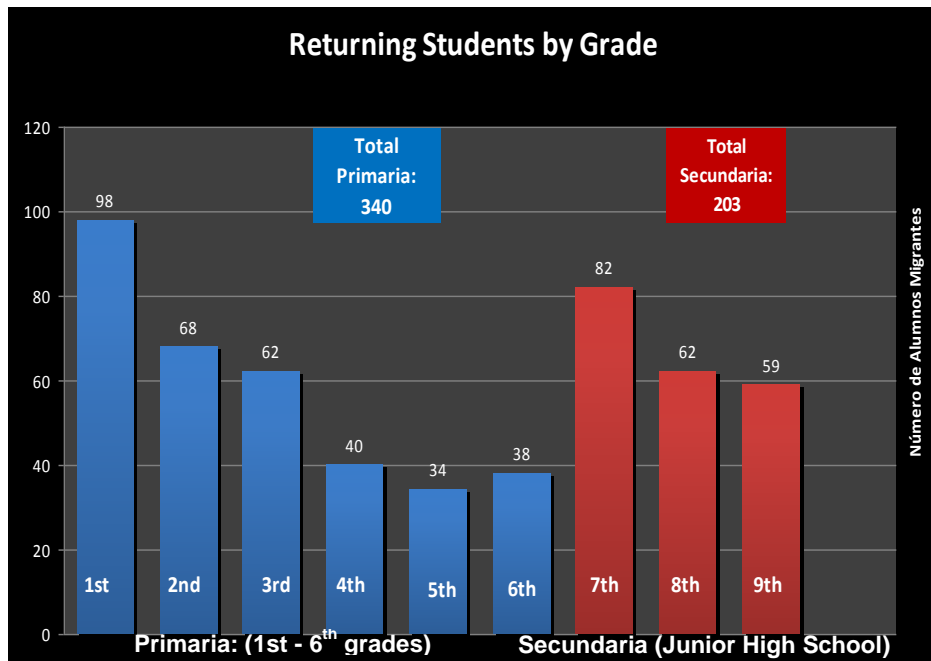
Federal law does not permit schools to ask parents or students regarding their legal status in the United States. We are required to educate all residents of our state. If these residents demonstrate limited English proficiency, we provide specialized English

instruction. As educators we invest our energy in every student in our classroom. We should insure that this investment is recognized in Mexico so that these transnational students can continue their studies there. As more and more of our students return to Mexico, our high schools need to be prepared to provide notarized transcripts to students when they are requested. If Spanish transcripts can be generated by our computer programs, this would be even better. For information on how to obtain an apostilled high school transcript contact the Secretary of State via the following web site: <http://www.sos.state.or.us/corporation/notary/howtoauth.htm#diploma>. If you are interested in professional development regarding apostilled documents, contact Irene Fernández, of the Willamette ESD at irene.fernandez@wesd.org.

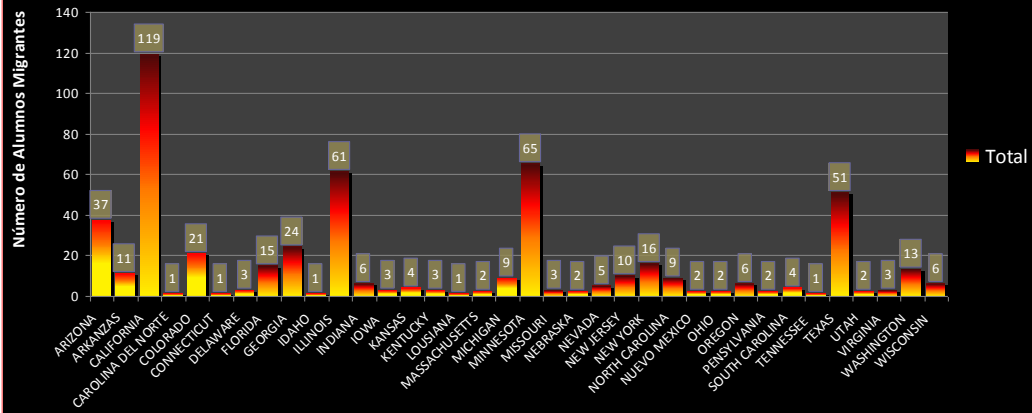
Education is the foundation for opportunity on both sides of the border. Mexico and the United States both provide access to basic education to all residents regardless of their immigration status. As the nation addresses immigration, the educational needs of the children who are affected, both American and Mexican citizens, must be considered. Currently Mexico provides open access to public education for grades K-9. Diplomatic negotiations with Mexico should encourage and perhaps assist in extending basic education to the twelfth grade. In the event that this never occurs, Mexico should be encouraged to accept applicants to *Preparatorías* and *Bachilleratos* who have successfully completed ninth grade in the United States, without requiring them to take an entrance exam.

Brito summarized, "This is a new phenomenon. Increasing numbers of students born in the United States that have had more than five years of education there are returning to our country with their parents. They are a special case, and should be a

concern of the United States government and are already a preoccupation of the Mexican government. These children, sooner or later, will return to the United States and need an education that reflects the needs of their future life. So, they and their teachers should be prepared to confront this new reality. We are no longer talking about bi-national students, a student caught between two nations and two cultures, but a transnational student who absorbs parts of both cultures and needs support from both countries at different moments of his/her life.”



Students per State



American States: Washington 13 and Oregon 6