

# **New York State Migrant Education Program (NYS-MEP)**

## **Theory of Action**

### **Section 1.2 of the NYS-MEP 2025-28 Service Delivery Plan**

The NYS-MEP is founded on an evidence-based Theory of Action (ToA) that is intended to bring consistency and excellence across the eight local METS program centers in the State. The ToA is a philosophy and approach that serves to address the needs of migratory children and their families and, at the same time, frames our investment and sustains our practice, seeking to motivate leaders and migrant educators through a clear and shared vision for delivering programs and services.

Migratory children, youth and families are resilient, hardworking, and possess diversity in thought, culture, language, and traits. These strengths contribute positively to their educational and life experiences as well as to their communities. At the same time, migratory students experience risk factors specific to migratory agricultural work, which increases their risk of not graduating from high school. Their migratory lifestyle interrupts schooling, creates social, geographic, and linguistic isolation, and amplifies poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and health-related concerns.

Migrant educators build on student and family strengths, engaging their self-interests, hopes, and dreams at the outset in order to develop a genuine partnership. Migrant educators also serve as advocates, empowering parents to act independently and encouraging them to share their ideas about what they need to better support their children and their communities. With help and support from the METS, migratory students and their families can acquire the skills, knowledge, abilities, and attributes to begin self-advocating, leading to college-, career-, and life- readiness, especially when transitioning out of the Migrant Education Program.

Through the ToA, the NYS-MEP aims to provide a comprehensive and holistic student- and family-centered approach to address the unique needs of migratory children. It frames a relationally rich culture and articulates ways where migrant educators and recruiters can express care, nurture growth, provide support, and expand opportunities so that relationships may be forged and strengthened.

The ToA is premised on three interdependent pillars or focus areas (see Figure 1, below). These are:

- 1) Subject Content and Instruction;
- 2) Advocacy to Self-Advocacy; and
- 3) Positive Identity Development

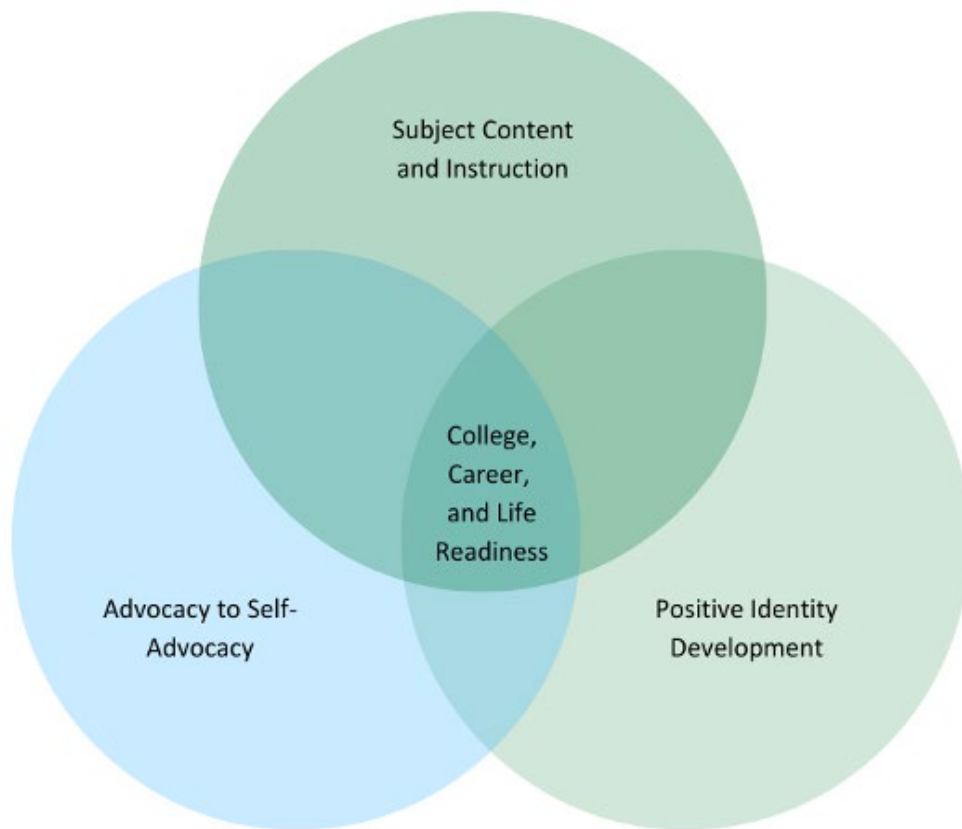


Figure 1. NYS-MEP Theory of Action Focus Areas

Consistent with the requirements under ESEA § 1304(b)(2), the NYS-MEP believes that these three interdependent focus areas will ultimately impact student achievement during the 36 months while the migratory student is entitled to receive MEP educational and supportive services by:

- Focusing on *Subject Content and Instruction*, *Advocacy to Self-Advocacy*, and *Positive Identity Development* as non-negotiable programmatic foundations to advance equity and educational access;
- Developing a culture of continuous improvements around these non-negotiable programmatic foundations; and
- Providing autonomy to each METS and allowing for flexibility in decision-making based on how to develop and implement services based on these non-negotiable programmatic foundations.

To these ends, the NYS-MEP directs its efforts and resources in supporting migratory children in developing their Reading and Mathematics skills in consultation and collaboration with their parents; acquiring knowledge and skills for self-advocacy; and fostering positive identity

development. These three interdependent focus areas connect the goals and objectives of student achievement to specific strategies and outcome measures as outlined below.

## **1. Subject Content and Instruction**

The eight local METS program centers provide supplemental academic support and interventions to school-age migratory children through one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in small groups. Such instruction seeks to promote foundational skills in core subject areas like in Reading, Mathematics, and other subject areas based on student needs and interests and helps students develop strategies to succeed in the classroom and on State and other assessments.

Research illustrates the benefits of one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in small groups to improve student grades, study skills, and confidence levels and indicates that such tutoring may be the most effective afterschool activity for improving academic achievement (Baye et al., 2017; Gutierrez, 2011; Inns et al., 2019; Jacob et al., 2016; Pellegrini et al., 2020). This is especially true when strategic, targeted tutoring goes beneath the surface of immediate academic need(s). The NYS-MEP focuses on providing migratory students with knowledge, skills, and strategies to establish a growth mindset (Dweck, 2015), as well as a framework from which to approach their assignments and to translate skills to real-world challenges.

Such one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in very small groups occurs in a relationally rich culture where individual and family assets are leveraged to achieve personal goals. The NYS-MEP seeks to provide services to and nurture relationships with migratory students – helping them become self-motivated lifelong learners and problem-solvers who are able to leverage their individual strengths to achieve their personal goals.

Preschool children, especially those who do not have access to school- or community-based educational opportunities, also benefit from the school readiness opportunities provided by migrant educators. These migrant educators play a critical role in connecting migratory parents and families to information and resources that are important to them and their children. They also provide strategies and support to parents as their children’s first teachers.

Out-of-School Youth (OSY), including those who have not had the opportunity to attend school, who have had interrupted or limited formal education, or who left school early, can succeed through one-on-one tutoring or tutoring in small groups as well. In New York, OSY are provided opportunities to continue to develop English language skills as well as life skills based on their expressed needs and interests.

## 2. Advocacy to Self-Advocacy

Using MEP funds, the eight local METS program centers provide supportive and outreach services related to education, such as advocacy, across the State, in accordance with ESEA § 1304(c)(7). Migrant educators play a key role in the NYS-MEP's efforts to establish consultative and collaborative relationships with schools, districts, service agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure migratory children and their families have access to the full range of services available. This is achieved primarily through coalition building and needs-driven advocacy. Additionally, migrant educators work to identify social and personal barriers that prevent migratory parents and families from fostering children's healthy development, advocating for local practice or policy changes to address these barriers and challenges.

The NYS-MEP believes in enabling and empowering students and parents by promoting personal agency, peer support, self-determination, access, as well as individual and system advocacy. The goal is to maximize their capacity for leadership, independence, and productivity, while fostering positive expectations for themselves and their interactions with society. This transition from advocacy by the METS to self-advocacy by students and families themselves is especially critical given the mandated 36 months during which the migrant-eligible student is entitled to receive MEP educational and supportive services, consistent with 34 C.F.R. § 200.89(c). These services are designed to help them develop the self-awareness and self-knowledge to:

- identify and understand their personal needs, interests, strengths, limitations and values;
- communicate, negotiate or assert personal needs, interests, and rights;
- make informed decisions and take responsibility for those decisions;
- believe they can and will attain a goal or goals (i.e., outcome expectancy); and
- be able to self-assess and adjust their goals and plans to achieve success.

The NYS-MEP implements different components to help students and families develop self-advocacy skills. This includes a student-centered planning approach that uses, among other strategies, goal-setting and personal learning plans to encourage students to actively identify and act on their own future goals or desired outcomes in terms of school-, life-, and career-readiness.

Parents and families are most children's first teachers. It is ultimately their responsibility to ensure that their children are receiving the appropriate services to which they are entitled. The NYS-MEP supports these efforts by ensuring that parents and families are educated on the MEP and other associated and relevant services based on their children's developmental needs, their rights under the law, and their acquisition of the skills and knowledge to form good working partnerships with their children's schools and school districts. In support of this, the MEP provides information, training, and referrals.

### 3. Positive Identity Development

Positive identity development is the social-emotional process of forming a healthy self-awareness, including self-efficacy and positive self-expectations in society (Niebergall, 2010). It is a process by which people come to understand themselves both as individuals and in relation to others. We are all shaped by personal characteristics, individual experiences, family dynamics, ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, historical factors, and social and political contexts (Tatum, 2017). Positive identity development amplifies the strengths that migratory students and families bring to schools and communities that are crucial for their academic and social success.

To promote positive identity development, the NYS-MEP fosters belonging and value for migratory students and their families by providing identity-safe teaching through one or more of the following strategies:

- Strategic Tutoring: Migrant educators support and facilitate the development of learners' identity and growth mindset through strategic instruction, in which a tutor not only helps a student complete and understand an immediate assignment but also teaches the student strategies to complete similar tasks independently in the future (see Hock et al, 1995). This approach meets students where they are academically and cognitively and primarily focuses on teaching skills and strategies that support learner independence.
- Culturally Responsive Education: Migrant educators use instructional practices and resources that integrate students' knowledge, learning styles, and prior experiences to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of learning (Brown, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This strengthens students' sense of identity and encourages them to draw on their cultural capital. Migrant educators also promote equity and inclusivity by fostering relationships and providing culturally relevant activities and experiences that enhance educational access, opportunity, and support critical thinking and success for migratory students.
- Social-Emotional Learning: Migrant educators facilitate a social-emotional learning process by which children and youth "acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (see [www.CASEL.org/what-is-sel/](http://www.CASEL.org/what-is-sel/)) through authentic METS-family-school- community partnerships.
- Trauma Informed Practice: Stress and trauma stemming from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can profoundly impact educational outcomes (see <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>). These experiences leave children less resilient and less able to manage their behavior. The NYS-MEP's trauma informed approach is not based on a deficit mindset aimed at "fixing" children. Migrant educators are not professional therapists. Instead, they seek to provide support by fostering strong, stable, and nurturing relationships with students and their families that can serve as a conduit for

healing and increasing resilience. Migrant educators also advocate, support self-advocacy (i.e., the ability to articulate one’s needs and make informed decisions about the supports required to meet those needs) and, where necessary, provide referrals to other resources.

## **Summary**

The Theory of Action (ToA) is a comprehensive and holistic framework designed to guide the implementation of the NYS-MEP through the eight regional METS program centers, the statewide Identification and Recruitment/MIS2000/MSIX/Data Security and Management (ID&R-TASC) program center, as well as individual migrant educators and recruiters. The ToA informs program development and decision-making at all levels. It defines the intention and aspiration to facilitate the development of learners with a growth mindset, while also empowering students and parents to advocate for their educational interests, personal well-being, and individual needs – leading to positive identity development.