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## **Migrant Families in Transition: A Case Study in the Deep South**

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### **Abstract**

This essay focuses on the lives and experiences of former migrant families that have recently settled in the United States, in Bulloch County, a rural community in southeast Georgia. The study compares and contrasts the experiences of 76 families with the lives of those who continue to follow agricultural jobs across the United States. In a review of existing literature on migrant farm workers, this study also includes field research with farm laborers, former migrant workers, local businessmen, teachers, and other professionals working with the newly settled Latino community. Findings are based on multimethod qualitative techniques that included individual interviews, participant observation activities, and focus group interviews. The project focused on three main questions: How are the experiences of settled families different from those families that continue to move in the search for work? What are the achievements and benefits for former migrant families that are settling? And finally, how are Hispanic families adjusting to their new homes in the heartland of the American South?

According to census statistics, Latinos are the fastest-growing minority in the

United States<sup>1</sup>. Between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population in the United States grew from 21.9 million to 35.3 million people (U. S. Census, 2000). This figure represents an increase of 61 percent, comprising 12.6 percent of the nation's population. Of these 35 million people, 33 percent make their homes in the southern region of the United States. A July 2004 estimate by the U. S. Census Bureau stated that 598,322 Hispanics resided in Georgia. This number reflects a 300 percent growth rate in the state's Hispanic population in the last ten years. Of this population, people of Mexican descent are the largest group comprising 67.8% of the total Hispanic community. Today, approximately 100 people arrive to Georgia each day from Latin America. This settlement pattern makes Georgia the third fastest growing state in Hispanic growth rates in the United States.

Bulloch County, Georgia is located in the heartland of the onion and tobacco industry and is home to approximately 55,000 residents. The county's residents are predominately Anglo-Saxon white (68.7%) and African-American (28.8%). According to the 2000 U. S. Census, Hispanics constitute 1.9 percent of the population, the majority of which are Mexican. While Hispanics are a small part of this total population in Bulloch County, their numbers reflect an astonishing 192 percent growth rate within the last ten years (U. S. Census, 2000).

Historically, Georgia's agricultural economy has attracted Mexican laborers to pick onions, tobacco, cotton, peanuts, peaches, and pecans. In the 1990s, however, the state began attracting an unprecedented number of Hispanic men for work in the construction industry. The employment opportunities were driven by Georgia's robust economy and by its preparation for the 1996 World Olympics games. The job boom made it exceedingly difficult for farmers in southeast Georgia to hire and retain an adequate work force. As a consequence, employers began seeking ways to attract—and keep—migrant laborers. Farmers did so through the use of crop rotation and by the mid 1990s they were providing year round employment opportunities (Andrea Garza Cruz, 2000). As a consequence, extended families from Mexico soon followed the men who had

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Hispanic" or "Latino" refers to people who reside in the United States or who were born, or whose family members were born in one of the Spanish speaking countries of Latin America.

migrated north. In a short period of time, large numbers of women and children were making their homes in the southeastern region of the state.

## **New Challenges and Achievements**

The sudden influx of Hispanic families settling in Bulloch County presented long time residents with a variety of new challenges. Particularly daunting was the large increase of Hispanic children enrolling in the county's public schools. In years past, schools in southeast Georgia did little to adequately serve the needs of non-English speaking students. Unlike other regions of the United States, Georgia (particularly, the rural parts of the state) had not been greatly affected by foreign immigration (Studstill & Nieto-Studstill, 1999). The large influx of migrant children who arrived to local schools remained only for the harvest season and their temporary status meant that educators had little training in meeting their needs. By the end of the 1990s, however, rural schools began facing the reality that migrant children and their families were no longer moving on.

In the summer of 2000, the Bulloch County School Board began addressing the challenge of meeting the needs of so many newly enrolled non-English speaking children. The school board designated two local schools, Langston Chapel Elementary and Langston Chapel Middle Schools to serve as the community's primary Hispanic serving institutes. According to elementary school principle Cindy Burcham (2000), the decision by the school board to place the majority of Latino children in target schools was driven by a lack of public resources and by the hope that the children would perform better by attending classes with their peers.

By 2004, the growth in student enrollment and the expansion of Hispanic children to other schools in the county reflected several other realities: the permanence of the original cohort; the successful advancement of Hispanic children to the next academic grade; and the continued enrollment of newly settled children in Bulloch County.

## **The Differences in Settlement**

Former studies of migrant families in the United States offer a distressing and sorrowful picture of a nomadic, exploitative and insecure life (Altman, 1994).

Seasonal labor in the fields is physically exhausting, dangerous, and always inadequate. Not only is farm labor minimally compensated, workers lack health benefits, pensions, and other worker protections. It is estimated that migrant farm workers in the United States earn between \$6,000 and \$18,000 a year depending on a large variety of factors: the type of farm labor that they engage in, the availability of work, and the method of compensation (most workers are paid by the number of bags they harvest rather than by an hourly wage) (Garza-Cruz, 2000). Families that have managed to find permanent work in Bulloch County have fared somewhat better. While still defined as America's "working poor" with earning of less than \$14,630 a year, settled families have escaped the harshest aspects of a nomadic life. For example, unlike migrant workers who work long hours seven days a week, settled workers in Bulloch County have secured a day of rest, working on average six days a week. Rest is a luxury for a migrant worker. Work in the fields begins at dawn and concludes only when the sun is setting. Not only is agricultural labor physically exhausting, it is very dangerous. In the United States, agricultural work remains one of the most hazardous occupations, surpassing mining in both job injury and illness (Bledsoe, 1989; Hollens, 1993).

Despite the dangers of farm work, a migrant laborer who is injured on the job usually has no unemployment compensation or disability protection. Most states, like Georgia, also offer few, if any, farm worker protections. Nancy Quinn, a legal expert in immigration law has suggested that in Georgia state officials have neither the resources nor the will to enforce worker protection laws, to enforce mandatory pesticide training for farm laborers, or to see that sanitary regulations are followed (Quinn, 2002).

Former migrants who have settled in Bulloch County have found employment in less hazardous work. While a few families continue to earn a living working in the fields, the majority of Latino newcomers have found employment opportunities in the Wal-Mart distribution center, in local landscaping businesses, in the community of Claxton in the large poultry industry, and/or in regional construction jobs. Additionally, a few Latino families in Bulloch County have opened their own small restaurant and retail businesses. Families interviewed about their newly established enterprises, offer a picture that is quite different from the traditional American formula for starting a new capital venture. Instead of securing a loan from a bank as most small American business owners do, these families saved money until they had enough funds to open their doors. The creation of small businesses by Hispanic families in Bulloch County appears to represent a new trend in the deep American south.

According to The University of Georgia's Selig Center of Economic Growth, between 1997 and 2002, Georgia tied with Rhode Island as the state with the second-fastest rate of growth for Hispanic-owned businesses.

Workers who have settled in Bulloch County and who have secured work outside the agricultural sector, seem to be less economically vulnerable. For migrant laborers, bad weather or extended rains can mean the absence of much needed work (Altman, 1994). Farm laborers are also greatly vulnerable to exploitation by growers or by their crew chiefs (the men largely responsible for contracting their labor and distributing their wages) (Graza Cruz, 2000). Of course, families that have settled in Bulloch County are also vulnerable to exploitation and job loss. The ability of families to establish roots and to create a home depends greatly on a stable local economy or on the ability of other family members to provide economic assistance in times of economic stress. Residential permanence, however, appears to have benefited many families particularly with regards to their local employers. Regional businessmen speak enthusiastically about their Hispanic workforce. John Quattlebaum, president of a prosperous Bulloch County business suggested that the company's Hispanic laborers were among the hardest working employees in the company. "They come to work on time and are always willing to work harder than the next guy. We would like to find ways of recruiting and retaining more of these workers" (Quattlebaum, 2000).

Among Hispanic families in Bulloch County who remain engaged in traditional agriculture, many of these workers enjoy employment with the same growers year after year. Permanent employment opportunities have provided these families with a real chance for financial stability. Growers have taken a special interest in them and report assisting with issues of legal status or in reuniting extended family members (Shannon, 2001). Such long-term relationships have led to remarkably supportive friendships.

Latino workers, however, have not always found the "welcome mat." In other rural communities not far from Bulloch County, white supremacy groups including the Ku Klux Klan have organized rallies against Hispanic newcomers. At the height of the national anti-immigrant climate of the mid-1990s, Hispanic farm workers in Bulloch, and nearby Toombs, and Tattnall counties were the targets of aggressive INS raids. In those raids both legal and illegal workers were arrested and many families were divided. According to immigrant attorney Nancy Quinn, victims were afforded very little legal protection (Quinn, 1997). "It was just traumatic," remembered Father Juan Lopez, a Catholic priest who works with the migrant community.

Many of our families lost contact with their fathers or mothers, their sons, or daughters. There was almost no information provided for those left behind. In other cases, we had entire families living in the woods, hiding from authorities, afraid to come out. It was terrible. It took us days to bring them out (Lopez, 1997).

In 1996 the Georgia legislature also passed its English-only law.” Unlike more progressive states such as North Carolina, Georgia has not allowed Hispanics to acquire driver’s licenses or to apply for car insurance without a green card. But Georgia is also a very employer-oriented state and, according to Joel Martin head of the Georgia Department of Labor in Bulloch County, legal authorities have had little political will to punish employers who have hired and continue to hire undocumented workers (Martin, 2001).

## **The Benefits of a United Family**

The communal character of Hispanic families is a very important part of Hispanic culture.

Mutual dependency plays an important role where family members share strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity (Lafayette De Mente, 1996). This sense of solidarity, “*familismo*” is sustained even after years of residing and working in the United States (Marin and Marin, 1991). The Latino family is understood as the key to survival and is the heart of one’s personal and collective identity. Hispanic children in Bulloch County routinely speak with respect of their parents, their older siblings, and grandparents. Yet in spite of the closeness of families, many children of migrant laborers live without their parents. Children who remain behind in Latin America, are often raised by another family member. The Christmas break is an especially important time for families and many have risked the journey back across the border to spend the holiday with their relatives. Increasingly, however, children are being united with families who have settled in the United States and this is true in the case of many families in Bulloch County.

For children old enough to have memories of their homeland, and especially for older children who frequently cross back and forth over the border, tensions can exist between fitting into American life and meeting the expectations of one’s culture. Assimilation with non-Hispanic children has been far easier for younger children. In the case of Bulloch County, difficulties have been reported

for middle school age youth, especially for boys. Taunts, fights, and peer alienation have been part of the social challenges of cultural assimilation.

Despite economic challenges, social dislocation, and the pressures of living in a foreign country, child abuse is almost non-existent in Hispanic families (Beck, 1997). However, because money is a constant struggle, marital tensions, drugs, and alcohol abuse can be prevalent problems in both the migrant and settled Hispanic communities. Spousal abuse does exist. The local women's battered shelter in Bulloch County reports that it has struggled with cases where Hispanic women have arrived to their door, terrified, without resources, and unable to speak English.

65 percent of Hispanic families living in Bulloch County have two parents living at home, but marital tensions can and do exist. In cases where fathers are absent, children are living with a mother, a grandmother, or another adult relative. Grandmothers in the community help to provide tremendous stability and support for a family, providing childcare, meals, and assistance with domestic chores.

In both the migrant and settled population, women play a critical role in decisions regarding the home and their children. Invariably, Hispanic youth speak with great esteem of their mothers and also their grandmothers. In Mexico, mothers have long been the foundation and moral cement of its society. "The goodwill, generosity, and hospitality for which ordinary Mexicans have long been famous are a result of the moral teachings and examples set by Mexico's mothers" (Lafayette De Mente 1996, 84). Despite their esteemed role in the family, however, women are not immune from the realities of divorce or abandonment. When migrant men have walked out on their families it appears to be due to the road's very hard life. Research suggests that they abandon a family because they are tired of being poor and because they may believe that somehow it will be different if they start over (Ashabranner, 1993). Prospects for a family staying together appear better for Hispanic families that have settled in Bulloch County. A stable job, a permanent home, and a sense of hope for tomorrow offer a more positive environment for marriages and for children. When asked to comment on their decision to come to the United States, Hispanic women in the community recalled their hopes of coming to *el norte* to join their husbands. All report that they were escaping poverty, job loss, and long-term unemployment. A woman whose husband found work in the construction industry in Bulloch County, recounted how she traveled with her two small children in very dangerous terrain. They walked for miles in the desert but only at night. Others followed similar journeys, sisters, aunts, and

grandmothers. Some women came smuggled hidden under the back seats of a car. Others simply paid border patrols to look the other way.

Several women in the community are expecting children. Expectant mothers are provided prenatal health care through Georgia's state subsidized program. However, once a baby is born their mothers lose their health care protection. As a U. S. citizen, a baby will continue to have some health coverage. Whether or not a baby's mother will take advantage of this protection depends greatly on the family's sense of security. Many Hispanics, both legal and illegal, are afraid to take advantage of the very services that they are entitled to (Rea, 2002). Despite the fact that many Hispanic workers have legal status to work in the United States, most still have a wife, a son, a cousin, or a parent who is not legal. This means that while they themselves are safe from deportation, a raid on a home or a job site may mean the deportation of illegal relatives.

## **The Sacredness of "Home"**

Because migrant laborers are constantly on the move and because they find employment in rural areas they often live isolated from the larger local community. For decades, migrant laborers were considered the "invisible people." In spite of their constant movement and invisibility, migrants have always had a strong sense of needing a place to call "home" (Ashabranner, 1993). Home is a place that nurtures the family and fosters one's true identity. The Spanish word, "*casa*" has no English equivalent that can capture that same sentiment. Thus, almost all migrant workers dream of returning permanently to their homes and many will travel back and forth across the border despite its many dangers (Garza Cruz, 2000). For many Latin Americans, the United States is a place to earn money so that a family can survive, but it is seldom "home."

It is a big step when people settle. Not unlike former immigrant groups to the United States, Hispanics that have settled can be usually found clustered together as neighbors in trailer parks or in housing complexes. Many families in Bulloch County have traveled from the same small villages or from the same districts in Latin America. That experience has provided them with a sense of connection. When asked about their choice for settling in Bulloch County, families noted the job market but also the fact that the rural setting is familiar, not unlike the villages they left behind, the county is tranquil and there is little crime.



Not unlike other former immigrant groups to the United States, Hispanic families have benefited from their group cohesion. Their settlement pattern has allowed them to organize many of their own activities. For example, parents usually coordinate their travel together and they usually attend church as a group. It is not uncommon for families to shop together and to share meals, especially during holidays. The cooking of tamales is especially popular and neighbors are usually invited to a meal. For many cultures, sharing food has been traditionally regarded as the essence of a home. Unlike migrant families that may lack a place to cook or a place in which to enjoy a family meal, settled families enjoy a real home where a parent can cook, creating a sacred space that nurtures a family.

The settlement of families has provided children a home that provides a sense of continuity and community. Children are not only in school together they are also neighbors. Youth routinely mention the friends they have left behind in Mexico, but they are quick to add that their newly acquired friends have made their adjustment to the United States easier for them.

Another benefit has been the opportunity for mothers to cooperate in watching over each other's younger children. In contrast, migrant farm families cannot afford or simply may not have access to childcare. As a consequence, very small children often accompany their families to the fields. Bringing children to work, of course, places them at great risk for injury, sickness, and even death. Many children are exposed to poisonous chemicals and have developed severe asthma or skin rashes. To keep them safe, families have been known to lock their children in hot cars. In other cases, small children have been run over by tractors. Dangers for children are not just in the fields. In a community not far from Bulloch County, a five year old child who had accompanied his mother to work lost his hand in a packing house accident (Garza Cruz, 2000).

Like migrant families, however, even parents that have settled still live with a sense of isolation from the larger community. Families rely on each other for help and while these communities are closely knit, that reality can make integration with the larger non-Hispanic community more difficult. In Bulloch County, for example, Hispanic women have expressed their feelings of isolation and discomfiture when leaving their enclaves. Women reported feelings of being closely watched when shopping or, in other cases, of being ignored when trying to ask for assistance. Men seemed to be less self-consciousness outside their community and were positive about their co-workers and supervisors. Nonetheless, many families expressed caution around African-Americans. Many expressed their beliefs that African-Americans perceive them with great

suspicion. Their fear is not altogether unreasonable. In October 2005, in Tifton, Georgia, a brutal home invasion and the murder of six Mexican workers by three black men shocked the otherwise sleepy southern community. While the motive appears to have been robbery, some in the community believed it was connected to a climate of hate. When the city's mayor decided to fly the Mexican flag at the town hall in honor of the dead men's memory, he was deeply criticized by many citizens in the community who argued that the U. S. and Mexican flags should not fly together (Maderazo, 2005).

The growing boldness of Hispanics to assert their rights in recent pro-immigration demonstrations in large cities like Atlanta have also raised unease among some black Americans. Some African- Americans bristle at the comparison made by Hispanics that their immigrant struggle is similar to the black civil rights movement of the 1960s. Other black Americans worry about the plight of low-skilled black workers who sometimes compete with immigrants for entry-level jobs (Swarns, 2006).

Despite the sense of isolation and discomfiture among Hispanics, the communities in Bulloch County have not had any reported incidents of ethnic violence. The white and black communities are currently coexisting peacefully with their new Hispanic neighbors. This lack of conflict may be credited to local schools and churches that have provided community assistance for recently arrived Hispanics. Time in their newly adopted home is also contributing. Parents that are working or participating in their children's schools and extracurricular activities report their sense of isolation breaking down. Demographics are also on their side. According to Engstrom (2001), whenever a new population moves into an area there is a potential for conflict, particularly during poor or declining economic times. Anthropological research suggests that "native resentment toward newcomers becomes hostile when the in-group reaches a concentration of about 13% (Atilas & Bohon, 2002). In Bulloch County, the Hispanic community is well below that level.

Unfortunately, the benefit of settling down and finding permanent work has created the American problem of "latch key kids." As parents find work, many Hispanic children return home to trailer parks unattended by adults. Last year, a young girl in the community was raped by a stranger when she returned to her empty trailer home. Despite efforts to encourage the family to report the incident, they failed to do so. Many families remain greatly fearful of authorities and are often fail to report such terrible crimes. The fear of authorities continues to be a common problem among both migrant and non-migrant workers alike.

## The Challenges of Poverty

For the children of migrant laborers life on the road is difficult. Not only is it a life of constant movement and insecurity, children in migrant families suffer from high rates of tuberculosis, flu, pneumonia, and intestinal parasites (Ashabranner, 1993). Malnutrition, tooth decay, and gum disease are also prevalent problems. According to Atilas & Bohon (2002), poor Latino families are rarely attended to by physicians or dentists. Families either cannot afford the medical care, or they are simply afraid of taking advantage of services even when those services are available.

The health condition of settled children in Bulloch County bears some resemblance to the health and dental problems of migrant children as they also suffer from poor diet and oral hygiene. However, a great benefit of settling has been the opportunity for children to receive limited health and dental services as well as nutrition and hygiene education. Health services have been provided by several organizations in Bulloch County including local physicians and dentists.

Money is always scarce for both migrant laborers and for families that have settled. Most Hispanic families are supporting relatives back home in Latin America. As a consequence, many workers cannot afford their rent or they live on the verge of being evicted. The poverty associated with migrant labor accounts for the fact that in United States most farm laborers live in overcrowded conditions, sharing beds in run down trailers or in houses that lacks adequate heat in the winter, clean running water, electricity, or toilet facilities. Many migrant workers sleep on floors or in their cars. By contrast, settled families are faring better. For example, the U. S. Census Bureau reported that Hispanic home ownership is on the rise. In the ten county metro Atlanta region, for example, home ownership jumped from nearly 22, 000 in 1990 to 94,000 in 2000. Likewise, a study by the University of Georgia found that Hispanic buying power in the state has soared from \$1.3 billion in 1990 to \$10.2 billion in 2003 (Bixler, 2003). By 2005, Georgia Hispanics' buying power had grown to \$10.6 billion, making the buying power of Latinos in Georgia 5% of the state's entire economy (U. S. Census, 2005).

Families that have settled in Bulloch County still lack many material things. Many of their trailers and apartments lack pest control, proper screening, air conditioning and/or heating. Furniture is usually old and broken and beds may still be shared with siblings. But unlike many migrant children in the Vidalia

onion fields not far from Bulloch County, children who have settled are not sleeping in cars or in chicken coops. Unlike migrant families who commonly share a trailer or an apartment with many people, settled families are also less likely to suffer the conditions of overcrowding. The effects of overcrowding are significant for many Hispanic youth struggling to stay in school. Living in a home with too many people can create a great deal of stress and anxiety and these pressures are strongly linked to emotional depression and lower student grades (Alva & de los Reyes, 1999).

Hispanic children in Bulloch County are very aware of their poverty and of the desire by their parents to buy them things that they cannot afford. Despite this awareness, there is a sense of being rooted and that sense of well-being is allowing these children to flourish.

## **The Education of Migrant and Settled Children**

When a migrant family escapes poverty it usually comes at the cost of a child's education. Education for migrant children is still secondary to a family's survival. Unlike other industries in the United States, agriculture is not regulated by minimum wage and it is the only industry that legally employs children under the age of 16. If children are under the age limit (age 10 for strawberries and potatoes, and 12 for other crops), they are not considered to be working, but rather "helping out" (Atkin, 1993). Thus, it is not uncommon to find migrant children laboring in the fields side by side with their parents.

Migrant children grow up quickly in the United States, learning to cook, clean, work, and care for younger siblings (Altman, 1994). When parents find employment, older children are often removed from school so that they can attend to younger siblings at home. For children lucky enough to remain in school there are tremendous challenges to success. In many instances, teachers have reported their inability to communicate or they cite a lack of educational resources necessary for meeting the academic needs of Hispanic children. Some migrant children report that they are the brunt of jokes or hazing (Garza Cruz, 2000). Some children fall asleep at their desks due to hunger, sickness, or exhaustion. Schools report that many newly arrived children are behind two to three grades.

For migrant children lucky enough to remain and succeed in school their stay in the classroom is always temporary. The constant travel and interruption of

education by the migrant lifestyle has a tremendous educational cost. 60 percent of all migrant children quit school before the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and only 11 percent enter the 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Ashabranner, 1993). By comparison, settled families have begun seeing the possibilities for a different future for their children. Many express the expectation that their children will finish with at least a high school education. Parents want a better life for their children. Unlike migrant families who are always looking to return to Latin America, most settled families are not looking backward. They recognize that the very conditions that have sent them northward are the very conditions their children will face as they grow into maturity: few jobs and fewer opportunities. Settled families are not depending on Mexico for their future. America is their articulated future.

In Bulloch County, some of the youth whose parents have settled still work on weekends and summer months helping their parents in the fields or assisting them in their restaurants or small businesses. On Monday morning, however, these students are back in school. Hispanic parents in the local community have made extraordinary efforts to support their children's education. They are faithful in attending academic programs and social functions despite the fact that few speak English and most are juggling the demands of their jobs (Burcham, 2000). In interviews for this study, many parents expressed frustrations with their own limited English and they have begun taking advantage of language classes, recognizing the need to speak well in order to benefit economically (Rea, 2002). Others have expressed their desire to learn English so that they won't be a burden on their children. Newly arrived parents rely greatly on their children's English speaking abilities and children often end up serving as interpreters in their social interactions. This parental dependency places a great deal of responsibility on young people and can create conditions of stress and anxiety for them (Alva & de los Reyes, 1999).

Despite the fact that children are always expected to speak English in school, they quickly move to their native tongue when they return to their homes. This practice creates great hardship on children. Research has demonstrated that the resulting stress, depression, and anxiety can all hamper a young person's academic achievement (Alva & de los Reyes, 1999). A prevalent myth is that children learn English quickly and easily by being exposed to and surrounded by native speakers. According to Live Oak Migrant Education Specialist Carol Ellis, second language acquisition takes years even for children. Teachers who are not trained to teach students with limited English skills or who are not sensitive to the struggle of learning a foreign language can destroy the very

conditions that help a child to succeed.

Immigrant children are also disadvantaged by a scarcity of appropriate assessment instruments and by a lack of trained personnel to conduct linguistically and culturally relevant educational assessments (Valdes & Figueroa, 1996). This is particularly true in poor school systems prevalent in the American south. Inadequate schools and the demands for speaking English is very stressful especially for newly enrolled students. Many children recently arrived from Latin America already suffer from family separation and culture shock. In Bulloch County, teachers have reported newly enrolled children spending their days sobbing or hiding under their desks (Macken, 2002).

Teachers in Bulloch County have been ill-prepared to address the needs of so many children with limited English speaking skills. In time, however, lack of formal training has been compensated by the schools' ability to foster positive attitudes, creativity, and sensitivity. The administrative staff and teachers have worked together to create high academic and behavioral expectations while fostering a compassionate, safe, and rewarding environment (Macken, 2002). Teachers have practiced patience, worked diligently at modifying their lesson plans, and learned to assess children on their progress rather than on their language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). The approach has been guided by the assistance of Hispanic-centered community and educational organizations in the service area.

## Conclusion

Newly settled families in Bulloch County face many challenges. These challenges include the struggle to learn English, job insecurity, the challenges of poverty, isolation, and the constant fear of deportation. Despite these challenges, we conclude by suggesting that newly settled families are succeeding and that they are enjoying benefits not afforded to those families who continue to follow the migrant stream. These benefits include the psychological and economic value of a "permanent" home, the emotional benefits of a united family and--as a consequence of both of these benefits—a real shot at an education and a different kind of future for their children.

Today, college *is* a realistic option for Hispanic youths. Last year the University System of Georgia clarified its admission policy and affirmed its commitment to allow undocumented immigrants to apply for entrance, if not for in-state tuition

rates. Out-of-state tuition costs are three times that for state residents and this can be a serious obstacle to college bound students. Despite this rule, however, some university presidents are waiving the out of state tuition for promising Hispanic students. There are other hopeful signs. Texas became the first state to let undocumented students pay in-state tuition and lawmakers in other states, including Georgia, are considering similar proposals.

A recent study completed by the Hispanic Scholarship Foundation found that by doubling the college graduation rates of Hispanics by 2010 could give a \$1.3 billion boost to the U. S. economy. "Meeting the educational needs of the fastest growing population in the nation—the Latino community—is critical to the country's future and is in the best interest of all Americans" suggested Sara Martinez-Tucker, president of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (Henry, 2001).

In Georgia, Latino students now constitute 1 million students (Childs, 2003). Many families interviewed for this study expressed hopes that college was in the future for their children. Today they are making progress in that direction. Both Hispanic youth and their families are beginning to believe that a college education and a new future is finally within their reach.

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