The federally funded College Assistance Migrant Program, which operates at the University of Washington and 39 others across the country, provides help to the children of migrant and seasonal farming families who want to go to college.

Jose Carmona, 21, is preparing to begin his fourth year at the University of Washington, where he's majoring in public health and plans to attend medical school. Carmona is from Wapato, Yakima County, where his family picks fruit in the orchards.

He was to spend those weeks in a program at the University of Washington for students interested in medicine, and for his family, for the first time, the idea of college was on the table.

"My dad had a lot of questions: What are you going to do in college? Where will you live? How are you going to pay for this?" Carmona recalls.

"I didn't have answers to his questions, either."

The federally funded College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP), which operates at the University of Washington and 39 others across the country, tries to provide answers to such questions by helping the children of migrant and seasonal farming families not only reach college but negotiate the academic, financial and cultural pressures of that crucial first year, with a focus on staying in school.

Six other campuses across the state also operate CAMP programs.

This month, the U.S. Department of Education, which oversees it, awarded the UW program a No. 1 ranking for achieving perfect scores on two key performance measures last year: All 61 CAMP participants completed their first year and continued on to their second year.

It was the only program to achieve that distinction.

That's noteworthy in part because college is seldom dinnertime conversation for many of these children whose families follow the agricultural harvest from farm to farm and sometimes state to state. Those frequent moves mean a lack of continuity in the children's K-12 education.

"It's hard for many of these kids to grow up with the idea of going to college because so few of their parents even
graduated from high school," said Luz Iniguez, director of the program.

**Migrant students**

Established in 1972, CAMP is open to migrant students who are U.S. citizens or legal residents, providing them with tutoring and mentoring, career development and financial support during their first year in college.

According to the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), some 35,339 migrant students are enrolled in K-12 in this state, including those who have dropped out but continue to be served, mostly unchanged from five years ago.

Gil Mendoza, assistant superintendent at OSPI, said CAMP was intended to “offset years of closed doors to migrant kids in families that historically have had no frame of reference to what a postsecondary education holds.”

“For many, the migrancy lifestyle is all they know — where children will help raise their younger siblings and, when they come of age, will work with the family in the fields,” he said. “The income they all generate would go to support the family.”

Iniguez said a UW CAMP recruiter each fall does outreach to around 1,000 migrant high-schoolers — most from Eastern Washington — and begins helping them think about and prepare for college. On average, 50 of those accepted to the UW are ultimately enrolled into the UW program.

Once in college, they are eligible for a range of assistance and among their obligations, they must attend monthly workshops and submit academic progress reports each quarter. They can also qualify for help with medical expenses. They are eligible for a quarterly stipend of $400 and, combined with other help, they can get up to $2,000 in assistance.

“**Cultural shock**”

The 21-year-old Carmona, who grew up in Wapato, Yakima County, is preparing to begin his fourth year at the UW, where he’s majoring in public health and plans to attend medical school.

He said the program connected him with other students of similar backgrounds as well as a broad network of people — from advisers to medical professionals — who could help him achieve.

“It’s a huge change coming from a small town onto a campus of 40,000 students. For a lot of students it can be a cultural shock.”

At the start of summer this year, Carmona said, he told his father he was going back to work “in the fields,” triggering a curious glance from his dad.

In reality, he spent the summer as an intern with the Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center, doing field research for controlling flies at dairy farms and a second project on heat-related illnesses among farmworkers.

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