INFORMATION CAPSULE
Research Services

STUDENT MOBILITY

At A Glance

Mobility, rather than stability, has become the norm for students in schools across the United States. The student mobility rate is now higher in the United States than in any other industrialized country. This Information Capsule discusses the reasons for student mobility and the characteristics of highly mobile students and families. Research studies on the impact of mobility on students' academic achievement and social adjustment and its effect on the entire school community are reviewed. Strategies designed to help schools reduce mobility rates and facilitate students' transitions to new schools are summarized.

Although all students change schools when they are promoted from one school level to another, some students also move to another school for reasons not related to promotion. The practice of students making non-promotional school changes is referred to as student mobility. Many students do not remain at one school long enough to benefit from an uninterrupted educational experience. Both residential moves and school transfers are now higher in the United States than in any other industrialized country. Approximately 20 percent of Americans move every year and between 15 and 20 percent of American children change schools each year (Education Week, 2007; Rhodes, 2006; Rumberger, 2003a; Sanderson, 2003a; Fisher et al., 2002). Despite the lack of stability in the nation's schools, school mobility is often excluded from the education reform agenda because educators assume that high student mobility is beyond the control of school districts and that student mobility affects only the students who move (Martin, 2002).

Reasons for Student Mobility

Many families move for reasons beyond the school's control. Some of the most frequently reported reasons for mobility include unemployment, job relocation, eviction, domestic problems, escaping high crime rates, or difficulties with landlords. Families also change residences voluntarily to take advantage of improved employment opportunities, to move to larger homes following the birth of children, or to gain access to better schools and neighborhoods (Educational Research Service, 2003; Fisher et al., 2002; Fowler-Finn, 2001; United States Army, 2001). In a survey that asked relocating parents to explain the reasons that prompted them to move, 66 percent said they moved because "they were seeking a better place" (Mantzicopoulos & Knutson, 2000).

Although a large proportion of mobility is caused by residential moves, researchers estimate that up to 40 percent of moves are related to dissatisfaction with the current school or the possibility of greater satisfaction with another school. Negative interactions with or impressions of school staff, as well as unresolved academic or discipline issues, are reasons parents frequently cite for changing schools. However, some parents are reluctant to express their dissatisfaction to school district personnel so the real reasons for some moves are never fully understood (Rhodes, 2006).

School conditions that contribute to high rates of student mobility include overcrowding, discipline policies that rely on suspension and expulsion, and perceptions of a negative academic or social school climate (Rhodes, 2006; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.). Fowler-Finn (2001) stated that the value society places on offering school choices to students may also play a role in the country's increasing mobility rates. A study of student mobility in California schools found that several school characteristics were associated with high student mobility, even after controlling for the effects of student background characteristics. Schools with lower student-teacher ratios and schools in which students reported doing more homework had lower mobility rates (Rumberger et al., 1999). A national study of student mobility in 247 urban and suburban high schools reported that schools with "better" teachers, as reported by students, and higher teacher salaries had lower mobility rates (Rumberger, 2003a). These findings suggest that school policies and practices can affect student mobility rates.

Characteristics of Highly Mobile Students and Families

Numerous studies have found that economically disadvantaged children have the highest mobility rates (Columbus Public Schools, 2006; Kaase, 2005; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Wright, 1999; Mao et al., 1998). Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1998) studied student mobility in Texas and reported that 15 percent of low income students, compared to nine percent of middle and high income students, changed schools at least once during the school year. Black (2006) reported that, according to the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 43 percent of low income fourth grade students changed schools, compared to 26 percent of

students above the poverty limit. Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1996) reported that low income Baltimore students were more likely to transfer within a school district, whereas higher income students were more likely to move into or out of a school district. They also found that the typical parent of a frequent intra-district mover was a high school dropout, while the typical parent of a district exiter had some postsecondary education.

Other types of highly mobile students include homeless children, children from migrant and military families, and foster care children (Education Week, 2007; Educational Research Service, 2003; Martin, 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Mao et al., 1998). Students attending urban schools are more likely to change schools than students attending suburban or rural schools (Black, 2006). Higher mobility rates have been found in school districts with large immigrant populations (Hartman, 2002; University of California at Los Angeles, 1997). Single parent families also move more frequently (Rumberger & Larson, 1998).

Researchers have found differences in mobility rates among ethnic groups. Studies of student mobility in the Columbus, Ohio Public Schools (2006) and Minneapolis (Family Housing Fund, 1998) found that movers were more likely than non-movers to be Black. Paredes (1993) examined student mobility in the Austin Independent School District and concluded that Black and Hispanic students were more likely to move than their White peers. Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1998) examined mobility rates in 6,000 Texas schools and reached a similar conclusion. They found that Black students' mobility rate was 20 percent, Hispanic students' mobility rate was 18 percent, and White students' mobility rate was 14 percent. The publication, *District Administration* (2005) reported the percentages of children, ages 1 to 17, who changed residences during 2004 were as follows: 21 percent of Black children, 19 percent of Hispanic children, and 15 percent of White children. Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy's (1999) study of California mobility reported that Asian families more often made strategic, family-initiated school changes, while Black, Hispanic, and White families more often made reactive changes related to perceived negative school situations.

Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1998) found that Texas mobility rates were higher for students identified

as being at-risk of dropping out and for students who were enrolled in career and technology education or receiving special education services. Students participating in gifted and talented programs were less likely to change schools. Rumberger and Larson (1998) reported that students who did not expect to attend college were 70 percent more likely to change high schools than similar students who expected to attend college.

Research on the Impact of Mobility on Students and Schools

Studies have focused on the impact of mobility on students' academic achievement and social adjustment, as well as the challenges it presents for the entire school community.

Academic Achievement

The research on the impact of student mobility on academic achievement has produced mixed results. There are two schools of thought on the issue of mobility and academic achievement: mobility alone is not the cause of poor achievement, but is a complicating factor for children with other at-risk characteristics, versus mobility causes lower levels of student achievement. The first group of researchers assert that mobility is strongly related to other student characteristics that are associated with academic difficulty, such as being economically disadvantaged. Therefore, students who are likely to become mobile, based on low family income, have preexisting achievement deficits and perform poorly, on average, before they move. These students are challenged for many reasons, not only because they move often (Wright, 1999; Mao et al., 1998; Alexander et al., 1996).

To demonstrate the validity of the theory that mobility in and of itself negatively affects academic performance, researchers conducted studies that controlled for students' background characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and family structure. These studies found that mobile students still scored significantly lower on standardized achievement tests than groups of stable students with similar background characteristics (Rumberger, 2003a; Rumberger, 2001; Mantzicopoulos & Knutson, 2000; Temple & Reynolds, 1999; Tucker et al., 1998). The debate over the impact of school changes on students' academic performance remains unresolved.

Kerbow (1996) studied the impact of a single school change versus multiple school changes. He reported that Chicago children who moved a single time lagged behind their stable peers by four months, on average, during the year they moved, but overcame the differences the following year. Students who changed schools four or more times were a full year behind their stable peers by the time they entered the sixth grade.

Pribesh and Downey (1999) found that changing both schools and residences during high school resulted in lower reading and math test scores, but changing schools alone had no significant impact on test scores. Rumberger and Larson (1998) concluded that the consequences of moving depended on the reasons students changed schools. They reported that students who made strategic changes to seek a better education usually reported positive academic outcomes, while students who made reactive school changes because of negative academic or social situations were more likely to report negative academic outcomes. Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1996) found that students who moved frequently within the same urban school district had the lowest average reading and math test scores, while students who exited the district had the highest average scores.

Researchers have studied the impact of the timing of moves on academic achievement. Studies have clearly demonstrated that school year movement is more detrimental to students' academic performance than summer movement (Rosen, 2005). Researchers have also concluded that the earlier in the school year the student moves, the less impact the move has on his or her academic achievement (Kaase, 2005; Mao et al., 1998). For example, Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1998) found that students who moved during the final two six-week periods of the school year had lower reading and math test scores than students who moved early in the school year. In contrast to these findings, Wright (1999) compared students who moved before spring testing with students who moved after spring testing. He concluded that the timing of students' move had no significant impact on achievement.

Studies examining if the effects of mobility are greater at certain grade levels have produced mixed results. One study suggested that the

negative impact of mobility was greater at the elementary grade levels (Ingersoll et al., 1989), while other studies found that older mobile students experienced more academic difficulties than younger mobile students (Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1998) concluded that students at both ends of the grade level continuum (kindergarten through second grade versus grades 8 to 12) were at the greatest risk of being negatively effected by mobility.

According to the United States Government Accounting Office (1994), students who changed schools more than three times before eighth grade were at least four times more likely to drop out of school. Two studies found that school mobility between the first and eighth grades increased the chances of dropping out of high school (Swanson & Schneider, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). In California, researchers found that the majority of dropouts changed schools at least once between grades 8 and 12, while the majority of non-dropouts did not change schools. Among Hispanic students, over 40 percent changed schools once before dropping out and 10 percent changed schools three or more times. In contrast, only 22 percent of White student dropouts changed schools once, while over 25 percent changed schools three or more times. The authors of the study stated that these findings suggested White students were more likely than Hispanic students to try several schools before finally dropping out (Rumberger et al., 1998).

There is also evidence that frequent mobility reduces the chances that a student will graduate (Rumberger, 2003a; Rumberger, 2003b). Rumberger, Larson, Palardy, Ream, and Schleicher (1998) found that California students who made one school change between grades 8 and 12 were less likely to graduate from high school than students who stayed at the same school. Among Hispanic students, 89 percent of those who made no school changes graduated from high school, compared to 63 percent of students who made one school change and 60 percent of those who made two or more changes. Among White students, 96 percent of those who made no school changes graduated, compared to 83 percent of students who made one school change and 62 percent of students who made two or more changes.

Paik and Phillips (2002) reported that students who were frequent movers were 35 percent more likely to repeat a grade. However, two studies found that only frequent (three or more) family moves predicted grade retention (Simpson & Fowler, 1994; Wood et al., 1993). Findings from the Kids Mobility Project (Family Housing Fund, 1998) indicated that the less students moved, the higher their attendance rates. Students who did not move during the course of the study had an average attendance rate of 94 percent. Students with three or more moves had an average attendance rate of 84 percent.

Social Adjustment

Complementary to academic success is the social development and formulation of relationships with teachers and classmates. Research suggests that mobile students experience problems adjusting socially to their new environment and are subject to social and emotional stress caused by disruptions in their relationships with classmates and teachers (Rhodes, 2006; Fisher et al., 2002; Hartman, 2002; Pribesh & Downey, 1999).

Fisher, Matthews, Stafford, Nakagawa, and Durante (2002) reported that mobile students exhibited more behavioral problems and social inadequacies than their stable counterparts. Rhodes (2006) found that parents of highly mobile students consistently reported that their children had social problems they attributed to frequent school changes. Some children became withdrawn and silent, while others became defensive and aggressive. Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy (1999) reported that multiple moves effected students' engagement with schools, resulting in increased incidents of behavioral problems and less participation in school activities.

Effect on the School Community

Rhodes (2006) examined data from 527 Ohio schools and found high correlations between mobility and school rating, mobility and adequate yearly progress, and mobility and percentage of performance indicators met. She concluded that schools must reduce their mobility rates in order to significantly improve their performance on the No Child Left Behind indicators. Mao, Whitsett, and Mellor (1998) studied the relationship between Texas schools' mobility rates and their accountability

ratings (low, acceptable, recognized, or exemplary). They found that the lower the school's performance rating, the higher its turnover rate: schools rated as low-performing had an average turnover rate of 30 percent; schools rated as acceptable had an average turnover rate of 26 percent; schools rated as recognized had an average turnover rate of 21 percent; and schools rated as exemplary had an average turnover rate of 15 percent.

High levels of student mobility in classrooms appear to increase the review of materials and slow down the curricular pace. Teachers are required to spend time on remedial work instead of new lessons, resulting in fewer topics covered over the course of the school year. Researchers have concluded that the higher the mobility in a given classroom, the more often the teacher has to interrupt, reteach, or change planned lessons in order to assess and integrate new students' existing levels of knowledge and skills (Rhodes, 2006; Martin, 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Heywood et al., 1997; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

Williams (1996) reported that half of Chicago teachers surveyed said their new students did not have the background to join the class at the level being taught. Studies have found that teachers view highly mobile students as less academically skilled. Teachers reported that it was highly disruptive and difficult to teach in classrooms with continual student turnover (Sanderson, 2003b; Rumberger, 2001; Mantzicopoulos & Knutson, 2000). Lash and Kirkpatrick (1990) found that teacher morale suffered when lessons were limited by classroom instability. Schools with high rates of student mobility therefore became less desirable places to teach and were often staffed by less experienced teachers.

High rates of student mobility may also influence the education of stable students. The Florida Division of Teaching and Learning (n.d.) reported that for students in a highly mobile school, the instruction and content was approximately one year behind that of students in more stable schools. In Chicago, by the time stable students in highly mobile classrooms reached the sixth grade, the curriculum was approximately one-half of a year behind that of schools with low rates of student mobility (Martin, 2002; Kerbow, 1996).

Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy (1999) found that test scores for stable students were significantly lower when they attended high schools with high mobility rates. One study, conducted by Heywood, Thomas, and White (1997), however, reported a different set of results. The authors compared stable elementary, inner-city students in classrooms characterized by high versus low levels of mobility to determine if there were significant differences between the two groups of students' academic gains. They concluded that classmate mobility did not have a significant impact on stable students' levels of academic achievement.

Schools with large numbers of transient students bear a disproportionate financial burden. School staff spend large amounts of time creating student files and forwarding students' cumulative folders to new schools. Other costs associated with mobility include purchasing of supplies and testing materials for new students and the failure of exiting students to return textbooks. Decisions regarding personnel and staffing, resource utilization, program planning, and instructional delivery are more difficult at schools with high rates of student mobility. Attempts to monitor school performance also become problematic when the student population tested changes significantly from one year to the next (Rumberger, 2003a; Sanderson, 2003b; Commonwealth of Australia, 2002; Hartman, 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Beck et al., 1997; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

Strategies for Addressing Mobility

School districts should focus on mobility as a controllable factor and work with schools to find solutions. There are a number of policies and practices schools can adopt to prevent needless mobility and lessen its potentially harmful effects (Rumberger, 2003a). Strategies fall into two categories: those designed to reduce student mobility rates and those designed to ease the transition to a new school when mobility is inevitable. A summary of these strategies is provided below.

Strategies Designed to Reduce Student Mobility

Both families and schools initiate student transfers in response to academic and social concerns. Although students and parents have the right to choose the best school for their needs, sometimes

school changes are unnecessary and harmful to students (Rumberger, 2003a). Strategies designed to reduce student mobility include:

- Creating a Positive School Climate

    In spite of the highly mobile nature of American society, most school personnel see their role in student relocation as administrative, focusing on the paperwork necessitated by transfers, instead of the academic, social, and emotional impact of mobility. The most general strategy for reducing mobility is to create an environment that communicates the school's desire to educate every student (Rumberger, 2003a; Plucker & Yecke, 1999).

    The Educational Research Service (2003) reported that many school districts are working to build caring school climates and create conditions that encourage students to stay at their school. The rationale behind these efforts is that when children are happy in school, their parents have a stronger stake in that school and a greater incentive to stay.

    Many parents of highly mobile children perceive transferring as the only solution to academic or social difficulties. They may exhibit a "needs a fresh start" mentality when they become discouraged or frustrated with their child's school. Rhodes (2006) suggested that "telling the parent explicitly we don't want to lose your child can go a long way towards rebuilding a working relationship with a difficult or discouraged parent." School administrators must model behavior that demonstrates that the school takes responsibility and will work with every child enrolled. Policies that discourage unnecessary transfers should also be implemented (Rumberger, 2003b).

- Limiting Intra-District Movement

    Researchers recommend enacting a district policy that allows students who move within the district to stay in their original school for the remainder of the academic school year. If possible, transportation should be provided to these students by the district (Rumberger, 2003b; Sanderson, 2003a; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Fowler-Finn, 2001; Rumberger, 2001; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning,

n.d.). Redistricting policies, which contribute to unnecessary mobility, should be limited (Rumberger, 2003b).

- Conducting a Parent Awareness Campaign

    School districts should undertake a comprehensive campaign to inform parents about the impact of mobility on students' academic and social adjustment. The goals of the districtwide campaign should be to convince parents to avoid unnecessary student transfers and inform them about research documenting the academic and social consequences of repeated moves (Education Week, 2007; Columbus Public Schools, 2006; Sanderson, 2003a; Martin, 2002). Activities that might be included in the public information campaign include:

    - distribution of letters providing information to parents about the negative impact of school-year moves and of options that may allow the student to remain in their current school for the remainder of the school year;
    - information provided to parents to increase awareness that, if a school change is necessary, the impact on the student might be lessened if the move was made in the summer rather than during the school year; and
    - administrators working closely and in a timely fashion with parents who express a desire to transfer schools and discussing alternatives to student transfers (Columbus Public Schools, 2006; Rhodes, 2006; *District Administration*, 2005; Sanderson, 2003a).

- Assisting Parents through Partnerships with Social Service Agencies

    Partnerships with social service agencies can help prevent or lower student mobility rates. Studies have shown that when schools provide multi-dimensional support systems to families in impoverished neighborhoods, family stability increases and student mobility decreases. Research has also found that a strong relationship exists between mobility rates and the strength of available support

systems, such as churches, neighbors, friends, and other community networks. Programs schools can offer to strengthen ties between families and the community include:

- school counselors or social workers, located in the community, to help families handle crisis situations that may lead to residential moves;
- a telephone number for parents to call for answers to questions on housing, transportation, and community resources;
- job training programs to enhance the employability of parents;
- educational development classes for parents (such as GED training and courses in computer training and English for Speakers of Other Languages);
- programs offering donated food and clothing to needy families;
- provision of health services for students and their families;
- parent education classes that provide strategies for developing their children's self-esteem and interpersonal skills; and
- assistance in finding affordable housing for highly mobile families (Columbus Public Schools, 2006; Family and Community Trust, 2002; Fisher et al., 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Fitchen, 1994).

- Working with Local Landlords

  Researchers recommend that schools establish relationships with public and private housing agencies since their policies can directly contribute to the stability of families. School districts can work with local landlords to promote a change in leasing dates. For example, in Illinois and Texas, school districts urged landlords to negotiate apartment leases from July 1 to June 30, instead of by the calendar year, to allow students to remain in one location during the school year. One school district worked with landlords to distribute notices warning new tenants that mobility was "hazardous to their children's education" (Rhodes, 2006; Fowler-Finn, 2001; Williams, 1996).

Strategies Designed to Facilitate the Transition to a New School

Mobility is often a strategic activity initiated by students and their families for a variety of reasons, including a change in job or residence. In these cases, there may be little that schools can do to prevent mobility and the only responses are to assist incoming and outgoing students to facilitate the transition to the new school.

- Intra-District Cooperation

  The creation of a consistent curriculum throughout a school district allows educators to adjust to the academic needs of highly mobile students and helps students understand what to expect when moving from school to school within a district (Fisher et al., 2002). One study of 33 urban elementary schools in the midwest found that low achievement scores were more closely associated with student mobility within the school district than with students moving in or out of the district (*District Administration*, 2005). The United States Army's Secondary Education Transition Study (2001) suggested that schools implement transportable, widely recognized programs, such as Advancement Via Individual Determination, International Baccalaureate, and advanced placement courses, to decrease the likelihood of academic disruption.

  Rhodes (2006) recommended the formation of a district-wide mobility monitoring committee to examine and oversee local mobility reduction efforts. Functions of the committee should include monitoring transportation policy, promoting student mobility data collection and analysis, and establishing interagency relationships between school district staff and community service agencies.

- Offering Welcoming Programs

  Programs that welcome new students and their families can facilitate the transition to a new school. Suggested activities include:

  - a school orientation video;
  - orientation meetings to provide students with information about school schedules,

lunch, activities, and other administrative details;
- school-wide "acquaintanceship" contests or activities;
- newcomers student club that meets weekly with school counselors;
- individual staff mentors at all grade levels to help students who are having academic or social difficulties;
- small-group lunches for new students;
- posting of classroom rules, procedures, and a list of supplies needed for each class;
- meetings for newly arrived parents to provide information and help them learn about the school;
- handbooks to acquaint parents with the procedures and customs of the new school; and
- tours of the school for new students and parents (Columbus Public Schools, 2006; Rhodes, 2006; Hopkins, 2004; Rumberger, 2003a; Commonwealth of Australia, 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Fowler-Finn, 2001; Beck et al., 1997; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

Schools can form Welcoming Committees that consist of a school administrator (principal or assistant principal), a counselor or school psychologist, one or more interested teachers, the staff member who coordinates volunteers, an office staff representative, and several parents. The committee can provide new students and parents with a student handbook, a district calendar of events, and information about the school and its educational programs (Hopkins, 2004; University of California at Los Angeles, 1997).

Some researchers have suggested the student's first day be limited to registering, meeting teachers, a brief tour of the school, and administrative details, such as desk and locker assignments, a list of needed school supplies, and a printed classroom schedule (Fowler-Finn, 2001; Rumberger, 2001).

Sanderson (2003a) reported that some districts hire "transitional specialists" (paid for with federal or state special project funding or outside corporate funding) to assist with high mobility issues. Functions of the specialists include:

- helping new families with the needed paperwork upon students' arrival at the school;
- bringing parents and students on a tour of the facilitates to help them feel welcome in the new environment;
- conducting welcome workshops to inform newcomers about the school's rules, routines, and desired behaviors;
- conducting monthly parent workshops to build parents' commitment to their child's new school; and
- acting as a faculty contact for parents by being accessible both in person and via telephone and e-mail.

- Administering Preliminary Assessments

When schools receive a student without records, researchers suggest administering a preliminary assessment of academic needs to increase accuracy in placement, identify needed academic support, and reduce the likelihood of academic and social disruption. Preliminary assessments increase the chances of placing the student in a class where he or she will succeed academically and socially. The assessments provide detailed, objective, and reliable information to direct the teacher's efforts. Schools should develop a short test that assesses reading, writing, and math skills and oral language development. Some schools also create a personal information assessment to familiarize staff with the student (Educational Research Service, 2003; Rumberger, 2003a; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Beck et al., 1997).

- Providing Students with Individual Attention

Teachers can give new students special attention to help them adjust to the school. Examples of these activities include:

- introducing the new student to the class;
- taking time on the first or second day to individually welcome and encourage the student;
- meeting with the student to explain classroom requirements, homework

policies, and grading procedures;

- asking the student to sit in the front of the classroom or standing near the student during the first week to make sure he or she is following the lessons;
- observing for signs that the student is struggling with the classwork or having social or psychological adjustment problems and referring him or her to other professionals as needed; and
- providing counseling programs that help mobile students develop the skills needed to handle the challenges associated with moving to a new area and school (Rumberger, 2003a; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

- Utilizing Creative Instructional Solutions

Many schools are finding creative solutions to narrow educational disparities between students and the instructional programs offered at their new schools. For example, in some schools, students are able to make up missing credits through independent study, after-school core academic classes, and work experience. Schools also provide newcomers with extra time in the computer lab, reading and writing institutes, and tutoring by instructional aides or parent volunteers (Rumberger, 2003a; Sanderson, 2003a; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Fowler-Finn, 2001; Beck et al., 1997; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.). The Commonwealth of Australia (2002) recommended that new high school students be allowed to participate in distance learning to provide continuity in learning when specific courses were not available at their new school.

Some schools have considered implementing year-round schooling to give students who enter at various points during the year the opportunity to move into a recently started class (Vail, 1996). Many middle and senior high schools schedule classes in blocks of time so students spend a longer portion of the day in each class. The uninterrupted, extended period of time has been found to encourage relationship building between students and between teachers and students. At the elementary level, some schools are offering multi-age classes, as well as looping,

where the teacher stays with the class for two or three consecutive years, to provide a sense of stability and continuity for both new and stable students (Paik & Phillips, 2002; Fowler-Finn, 2001). Researchers have also suggested using cooperative learning to help new students get acquainted with their classmates, lower anxiety levels, and improve self-esteem (Gillies, 1998; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

- Conducting Follow-Up Sessions

The United States Army's Secondary Education Transition Study (2001) recommended that systems be put in place to check on new students two weeks after their arrival and again four to six weeks later. At the first follow-up session, the principal and/or social worker should review the first weeks of school with the student and advise him or her about curricular opportunities and upcoming activities. Students should be provided with the opportunity to ask questions and obtain information pertaining to their specific needs. At the second follow-up session, staff can evaluate the student's academic and social adjustment to the new school (Hopkins, 2004; Rumberger, 2003a).

Rumberger (2003a) suggested that schools closely monitor the educational progress of students with three or more previous school changes. He recommended that schools routinely assess the past enrollment history of incoming students in order to identify them and target appropriate interventions. New students should be observed for distress signals, such as aggression, withdrawal, or over-talkativeness (Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.). Referral procedures should be created for new students who are displaying adjustment problems (Rumberger, 2003a).

- Implementing Buddy Systems

Assignment of buddies (pairing a new student with an existing student) has become a common way to orient new students to classroom rules and procedures, as well as to school facilities, resources, schedules, and rules. Buddies free up staff time since

students, instead of teachers, introduce new students to the school. Buddies can be chosen for academic or behavioral reasons and many teachers report looking for certain personality characteristics when forming a learning pair (Education Week, 2007; Rhodes, 2006; Rumberger, 2003a; Sanderson, 2003b; Fisher et al., 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Beck et al., 1997; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

- Encouraging Participation in Extracurricular Activities

  The United States Army's Secondary Education Transition Study (2001) concluded that extracurricular experiences are an important part of the transition process. Students should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities to develop social skills and improve self-esteem and attitudes towards school. Suggested ways to increase student participation in extracurricular activities include creating information packets about available activities and organizing weekly lunchtime information booths, manned by students, to explain the various activities and procedures for joining (James, 2004; Rumberger, 2003a).

- Establishing a Personal Connection with New Parents

  School staff should make special efforts to become acquainted with the parents of new students. Establishment of a personal connection helps reduce the sense of anonymity new parents often experience. Every parent of a new student should be interviewed to learn about their child's history and academic performance. School staff should help parents understand the new school and the expectations for their child. After-hours (evening or Saturday) parent conferences should be planned to accommodate work schedules. Many schools report offering counseling to help families adapt to a new area and school. Family support teams, comprised of school counselors or social workers, parents whose children have been enrolled at the school for two or more years, and community liaisons,

can encourage parents to serve as partners with schools in the academic and social development of their children (Rhodes, 2006; Rumberger, 2003a; Fisher et al., 2002; Beck et al., 1997).

Home visitation programs can help families understand school programs and policies and community services that might be useful for the family. Visits to parents' homes help reduce the stigma for families with special needs while still providing them with useful information (Paik & Phillips, 2002).

Families Helping Families is an elementary-level program that matches new families with volunteer families who have had children in the school for at least two years. Studies have shown that participation in the Families Helping Families program increased parent involvement with the school and provided families with a sense of belonging (Paik & Phillips, 2002; Fowler-Finn, 2001).

- Providing Assistance to Exiting Students

  One of the most widely cited problems working with mobile students is the delay in receiving their academic records. The delay in records transfer often results in inappropriate placements. Without records, school staff are not informed about learning disabilities, behavioral issues, or medical problems and students are not referred for needed special services. When students transfer from other countries, it is often difficult to assess what grades they have attended and what knowledge and skills they have acquired (Rhodes, 2006; Sanderson, 2003b; Fisher et al., 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Beck et al., 1997; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

  Lash and Kirkpatrick's (1990) study of a California elementary school reported that less than 10 percent (2 of 21) teachers received advance notification of a new student. Records usually arrived several weeks after the student. In order to provide assistance to exiting students, schools should facilitate efficient records transfers to students' new schools. In addition to achievement data,

other types of helpful information can be forwarded to the student's new school, including:

- the student's interests, likes, and dislikes;
- information about the current school (organizational structure, programs offered, methods of instruction);
- a learning analysis, prepared by the student's classroom teacher, describing the student's approach to tasks, how outcomes are achieved, and any gaps in learning; and
- confidential reports written by the classroom teacher, school counselor, or other appropriate school staff, as needed (Kaase, 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, 2002).

Other activities schools can engage in to assist exiting students include:

- School staff can educate parents about records transfer requirements to reduce the time it takes for records to reach the student's new school.
- Before the student leaves, teachers can encourage classmates who have moved to share their experiences and explain how it felt to attend a new school.
- Teachers who know in advance that a student is moving can ask the student for a list of questions he or she has about the new school. The teacher can then call the new school to obtain answers.
- Schools can send an electronic portfolio to the student's new school. Electronic (or digital) portfolios are an extension of the portfolios many schools already keep: compilations of work collected throughout the year that can be used for assessment and reporting purposes and to show progress in student learning over time. Electronic portfolios are recorded and stored on a computer and can be forwarded electronically or by CD to the student's new school as part of the records transfer process (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002; Education World, 1999).

- Providing Professional Development

  It is important that teachers and school administrators are prepared to work with transient populations. School staff should receive general awareness training regarding the needs and circumstances of highly mobile students. Training should encompass the use of flexible instructional strategies, multiple methods of assessing students' learning needs, and the unique challenges facing mobile families. Many teachers also need assistance dealing with the emotional drain that occurs when working with frequently-changing student populations (investing many hours in a child and witnessing a great deal of academic progress, then seeing the student leave the school) (Fisher et al., 2002; Beck et al., 1997; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

  Additional professional development should be provided if a school's population includes special categories of mobile students, such as migrant or homeless students, in order to increase staff's sensitivity to and understanding of these students' needs. Training is especially important for staff members who are responsible for enrolling, assessing, and placing new students (Fisher et al., 2002; Paik & Phillips, 2002).

- Analyzing Enrollment Data

  Researchers recommend that all schools with high rates of student mobility complete a detailed analysis of their enrollment data. The analysis should include the number of students enrolled, amount of time between new enrollments and withdrawals, and the average length of each student's enrollment. Administrators can use this data to manage student mobility, make decisions about staffing and grade level organization, and inform staff about student learning needs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002; Florida Division of Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

- Recovering Textbooks

  Schools with high rates of student mobility often suffer financial losses from withdrawing students who fail to return their textbooks.

Schools that are heavily impacted by mobility should establish procedures to recover textbooks from students. Schools may want to consider a financial incentive system that provides students with cash awards when they return their books (Rumberger et al., 1999).

Summary

Many students do not remain in one school long enough to benefit from an uninterrupted educational experience. The student mobility rate is now higher in the United States than in any other industrialized country. Some of the most frequently reported reasons for mobility include unemployment, job relocation, eviction, domestic problems, escaping high crime rates, or difficulties with landlords. Although a large proportion of mobility is caused by residential moves, research has indicated that many moves are related to dissatisfaction with the current school or the possibilities of greater satisfaction with another school.

Economically disadvantaged children have the highest mobility rates. Other types of highly mobile students include homeless children, children from migrant and military families, and foster care children. Researchers have found differences in mobility rates among ethnic groups, with Black and Hispanic families being more likely to move than White families.

The research on the impact of mobility on students' academic achievement has produced mixed results. Although some studies have found that mobility leads to decreased academic performance, regardless of students' background characteristics, other research indicates that mobility in itself is not a cause of lower levels of academic achievement, but is instead a complicating factor for children with other at-risk characteristics. Research has shown that mobile students experience problems adjusting socially to their new environment. Studies have also suggested that high levels of student mobility present challenges for the entire school community. High mobility rates have been linked to lower school accountability ratings, slower classroom curricular paces, and lower teacher morale. Some studies have even found that students in mobile classrooms have lower academic performance than students in stable classrooms.

There are a number of strategies schools can implement to prevent needless mobility and to help lessen its potentially harmful effects. Strategies designed to reduce student mobility rates include creating a positive school climate, limiting intra-district movement, conducting parent awareness campaigns, and assisting parents through partnerships with social service agencies. Strategies designed to ease the transition to a new school when mobility is inevitable include offering welcoming programs, utilizing creative instructional solutions, implementing buddy systems, and establishing personal connections with parents.

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