



The Principals' Partnership
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A Program of Union Pacific Foundation

Research Brief

Welcoming New Students

Question: What are schools doing to welcome new students?

Summary of Findings:

May schools face the challenge of welcoming new students each year. The issue is larger than being hospitable, however. The negative effects of mobile students are well documented. What follows are excerpts from articles on the topic.

Estimates suggest 20-25% of students change schools each year. The figures are greater in school districts with large immigrant populations. While some make the transition easily, many find themselves alienated or "out-of-touch" in new surroundings. Youngsters entering a new school and neighborhood are confronted with multiple transition challenges. The challenges are compounded when the transition also involves recent arrival in a new country and culture.

Student Mobility Has Negative Effects for Transient Students, Schools, Teachers, and Classmates

- Mobility is associated with lower student achievement (Fowler-Finn, 2001).
- An achievement gap exists between schools with a high mobility rate and those that are more stable (Kerbow, 1996).
- Classroom instruction in schools with higher mobility rates is more likely to be review oriented and have slower instructional pacing from month to month and grade to grade (Kerbow, 1996).
- High school students who change schools are at least twice as likely not to graduate—research indicates that only 60 percent will graduate (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999).
- In all income categories, highly mobile students are more likely to be retained a grade than children who do not change schools (Fowler-Finn, 2001).

Interventions for welcoming and involving new students and families are as complex as any other psychological and educational intervention. This is especially so since the focus must not only be on those entering at the beginning of a term but on all who enter throughout the year. Clearly, the activity requires considerable time, space, materials, and competence. Specific strategies evolve over three overlapping phases:

1. The first phase is broadly focused -- using general procedures to welcome and facilitate adjustment and participation of all who are ready, willing, and able.
2. Some people need just a bit more personalized assistance. Such assistance may include personal invitations, ongoing support for interacting with others and becoming involved in activities, aid in overcoming minor barriers to successful adjustment, a few more options to enable effective functioning and make participation more attractive, and so forth.
3. More is needed for those who have not made an effective adjustment or who remain uninvolved (e.g., due to major barriers, an intense lack of interest, or negative attitudes). This phase requires continued use of personalized contacts, as well as addition of cost intensive outreach procedures as feasible.

In pursuing each phase, a major concern is overcoming barriers that make it hard for newcomers to function in the new community and school.

One useful mechanism is a Welcoming Steering Committee. Such a committee is designed to (a) adopt new strategies that fit in with what a school already is doing and (b) provide leadership for evolving and maintaining a welcoming program. The group usually consists of a school administrator (e.g., principal or AP), a support service person (e.g., a dropout counselor, Title I coordinator, school psychologist), one or more interested teachers, the staff member who coordinates volunteers, an office staff representative, and hopefully a few dedicated parents.



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States are developing programs in an attempt to lower student mobility rates and mitigate the effects of mobility on students' education. Examples of these programs and strategies include:

- providing outreach to educate parents about minimizing the negative effects of mobility,
- creating "buddy systems" by partnering new students with current students,
- implementing district-wide and state-wide standardized curricula,
- developing efficient student record-tracking systems between schools and districts, and
- providing professional development to assist teachers in meeting the needs of highly mobile students.

Online Resources:

Easing the Impact of Student Mobility: Welcoming & Social Support

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<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/easimp.htm>

A Table from our newsletter *Addressing Barriers to Learning*,

Vol. 2 (4), Fall 1997

Outline of Welcoming Steps and Activities. A terrific list of activities to welcome new students.

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/fall97.htm>

Student Mobility

"Student mobility" refers to the phenomenon of students changing schools for reasons other than grade promotion. Students who transfer frequently between schools during the school year are at greater risk for academic and behavioral problems (Hartman, 2002). Some research suggests that differences in student achievement between non-mobile and mobile students can also be attributed to students' background characteristics (Rumberger, 2002). For example, a Minneapolis-based study found a strong relationship between mobility and a student's race and family income (Kids Mobility Project, 1998)

<http://www.edweek.org/rc/issues/student-mobility/>

Student Mobility's Effect on Academic Achievement

For children caught in the shuffle, frequent moves into different schools and/or homes can negatively impact academic performance. With poverty and mobility both contributing to the achievement gap—and with poverty being highly correlated with mobility—understanding how these issues jeopardize achievement is critical.

<http://www.ncrel.org/policy/pubs/html/rmobile/effect.htm>

Addressing the Causes and Consequences of High Student Mobility: The Role of School Systems and Communities

A Forum — March 1, 2002

Approximately one-quarter of this nation's students change schools three or more times over the course of a public school career. High student mobility has consequences for students, both mobile and non-mobile, and can threaten educational attainment, curriculum continuity and school stability. For students, the long-term effects of high mobility include lower achievement levels and slower academic pacing, culminating in a reduced likelihood of high school completion. For residentially unstable students, such as homeless, migrant and foster care children, high mobility is another barrier, among others, to an adequate education. Low-income and minority students are more likely to experience excessive classroom mobility, and the deleterious effects of this transience are most severe for such students.

<http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/2002/fb030102.htm>



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Searching for Stability:

The negative effects of high mobility are well documented, but how can schools address students' needs amid the pressure of accountability? The number of kids who change schools is astounding. And their mobility rates keep climbing. Chicago Public Schools, which has long struggled with high mobility, reports that 23 percent of students who entered first grade in 1999 had changed schools by the end of the year. Four years after entering first grade, more than 50 percent had changed schools, a trend that's continued despite districtwide efforts to reduce mobility, says CPS research analyst Jeffrey Rosen.

<http://www.asbj.com/2006/09/0906research.html>

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