

## Definition

The term “highly mobile students” describes children and youth ages 6-21 who have moved six or more times during their school years (Popp, Stronge, Hindman, 2003). Other definitions include students who have moved more than once during the year (U.S. GAO, 1994). Many circumstances lead to high mobility such as homelessness, foster care, migrant work patterns, poverty, family disruptions, immigration, family military assignments, and unaccompanied youth.

Types of student mobility include: 1) inner city mobility often prompted by the job market, housing, economic condition; 2) intra-city mobility which can be caused by poverty but also by upward mobility; and 3) movement due to economic circumstances that cause families to move, such as seasonal work.

## Rationale and Research: Why should we care about student mobility?

Although high levels of mobility affect many students in our schools, this highly disruptive factor often remains outside the range of district and/or improvement plans. National statistics on mobility (GAO, 1994) present a dismal picture:

- Inner city students are hardest hit;
- Approximately 25% of urban 3rd graders were found to be highly mobile compared with only about one seventh of suburban and rural students;
- Half a million students attended more than three schools between 1st and 3rd grades;
- Poor families move 50% to 100% more often than non-poor families;
- Some urban schools have reported turnover rates of 40-80% (Stover, 2000);
- The stress of mobility affects both students and schools.
- The consequences for academic achievement can be severe:
- Mobile students are half as likely to graduate from high school as their non-mobile peers;
- Mobile students have lower attendance rates and lower achievement rates: a study conducted by the Family Housing Fund (1998) showed that a 20% absentee rate resulted in achievement scores 20 points lower than their stable peers;
- Mobile students are twice as likely to repeat a grade;
- Students may take 4-6 months to recover academically from a move;

- Highly mobile students experience high levels of isolation;
- Schools with high mobility rates often show low overall performance even for its stable population of students;
- For highly mobile students who qualify for services under IDEA, there are additional areas of vulnerability such as (Pierce & Ahearn, 2007):
- Not being identified for service or difficulty with diagnosis;
- Lack of timely assessment;
- Lack of continuity of services; and
- Lack of timely or efficient records transfer;

### **Case Examples: Promising Practices**

**Department of Defense (DOD) Schools:** Although children from military families experience high mobility, their academic performance does not necessarily suffer. Students in DOD schools scored above the national average at each grade level on the 2003 CTB/Terra Nova Achievement tests. On the 2003 NAEP, minority students in DOD schools scored considerably better than minority students in most states. A range of factors contributed this success, among them centralized direction-setting with local decision-making; policy coherence and regular data flow on instructional goals, assessments, accountability, and professional development; an academic focus with high expectations for all; sufficient financial resources linked to instructionally relevant strategic goals; and continuity of care through high quality pre-school and after-school programs.

### **Welcoming and Social Support Strategies as Indicators of School Reform**

Schools that are prepared to address the needs of highly mobile students build in strategies at strategic transition points: 1) in advance (e.g., establish routines to make transfers less disruptive for students; develop brief student assessments; develop faculty awareness and professional development; create activities to welcome and acclimate students and families quickly to the school); 2) on arrival (e.g., create welcome packets for students and families; make personal contact with parents and students when registering; train student buddies, provide coaches to orient new students; offer personalized instructional supports such as tutors, computer assisted programs, parent volunteers); 3) at departure (e.g., provide for closure activities for student who is leaving and for students in the class, especially

when a child leaves unexpectedly; maintain a student record that the accompany the student to the next school).

### **Flexible Instructional Strategies to Help Students Succeed**

Districts can create inter- and intra- district communication to exchange information, align curricula, and develop flexible ways by which students can earn credit. Fostering a norm of high expectations for all is critical; expectations for learning and behavior should be explicit and presented repeatedly throughout the year. Teachers should be prepared with quick assessments that allow assigning students appropriately even before transcripts arrive. Classroom instructional strategies that incorporate a variety of configurations or groupings make it easier and less disruptive to meet different and changing instructional needs while meeting individual learning demands. Developing a report-card-in-progress is an effective way of communicating to the child what he has mastered and what he needs to work on

## References

Colorado Department of Education, Center for Research Strategies. (2005). *Colorado educators study homeless and highly mobile students*. Denver, CO: Author.

[www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/download/pdf/COPAR520Book%20Final%204-25-05.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeprevention/download/pdf/COPAR520Book%20Final%204-25-05.pdf)

Pierce, L., & Ahearn, E. (2007). *Highly mobile children and youth with disabilities: Policies and practices in five states*. inForum (Brief Policy Analysis). Available online at

[www.projectforum.org/docs/HighlyMobileChildrenandYouthwithDisabilities-PoliciesandPracticesinFiveStates.pdf](http://www.projectforum.org/docs/HighlyMobileChildrenandYouthwithDisabilities-PoliciesandPracticesinFiveStates.pdf)

*Highly mobile students: Educational problems and possible solutions*. (1991). *ERIC/CUE Digest*, Number 73. Available online at [www.ericdigests.org/1992-5/mobile.htm](http://www.ericdigests.org/1992-5/mobile.htm)

United States General Accounting Office. (1994). *Elementary school children: Many change schools frequently, harming their education*. (GAO/HEHS-94-95). Washington, DC.

Walls, C.A. (2003) *Providing mobile students with an effective education*. *Eric Digest*.

[www.ericdigests.org/2004-3/mobile.html](http://www.ericdigests.org/2004-3/mobile.html)

The articles below can be found on the SERVE website. [www.serve.org/nche/ibt/educ\\_mobile.php](http://www.serve.org/nche/ibt/educ_mobile.php)

Popp, P. A.; Stronge, J. H.; & Hindman, J. L. (2003). *Students on the move: Reaching and teaching highly mobile children and youth*. National Center for Homeless Education. (Contains an exhaustive checklist of interventions and strategies to support highly mobile students.)

*Reading on the go! (Volume 1) Students who are highly mobile and reading instruction*,

*Reading on the Go! (Vol 2) A Handbook of Resources*.

Stronge, J. H., Popp, P. A., & Grant, L. W. (2007). *Effective teachers of at-risk and highly mobile students: A review of the literature*. National Center for Homeless Education.

**Resources**

ESCORT [www.escort.org](http://www.escort.org)

ESCORT is a national resource center on teaching the children of migrant farm workers and other English language learners and maintains the National Migrant Education Hotline. “The Challenge of Educating English Language Learners in Rural Areas” provides examples of strategies schools and districts have used to reduce cultural isolation of ELLs. Available online at <http://easternstream.org/files/active/1/Challenges%20Article.pdf>

SERVE, Inc. National Center for Homeless Education [www.serve.org/nche/](http://www.serve.org/nche/)

The Center provides research, resources, and information enabling communities to address the educational needs of children and youth experiencing homelessness.