



A publication of  
**Policy Analysis for  
California Education**

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EDUCATION RESEARCH  
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CALIFORNIA BERKELEY,  
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# PACE

## POLICY BRIEF

*Vol. 1, No. 1 May 1999*

## THE EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF MOBILITY FOR CALIFORNIA STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS

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Although all students change schools when they are promoted from one school level to another, some students also move from one school to another for reasons other than promotion. The practice of students making non-promotional school changes is referred to as **student mobility**. Past research has documented that student mobility is widespread in the United States and often detrimental to the educational achievement of students. Yet little of this research has focused on the secondary level or examined mobility from the school perspective.

This study examined three important aspects of student mobility—incidence, consequences, and causes—as they apply to students and schools in California, especially at the secondary level. More specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

- 1. What is the incidence of mobility among California students and California schools? How does the incidence vary among types of students and schools?*
- 2. What are the educational consequences of student mobility for students and for schools?*
- 3. What are the causes of student mobility for students and for schools? To what extent do families and schools contribute to the problem?*
- 4. What strategies can be used by families, schools, community agencies, and the state both to reduce the incidence of “needless” mobility and to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of student mobility that does occur?*

The study drew on an extensive set of data on California students, parents, and schools, including: surveys of 1,114 California 8th grade students who were followed and interviewed over a six year period from 1988 to 1994 as part of the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS); surveys of 51 California high schools and their 10th grade students who were followed and interviewed between 1990 and 1992 as part of the NELS High School Effectiveness Study (HSES); interviews with 19 mobile high school students and their parents from Los Angeles; and interviews with 32 school administrators, counselors, and teachers from 10 secondary schools in one urban and one suburban district in Southern California. The data were used to provide both descriptive information on the nature of mobility among students and schools and to test some statistical models that identified some specific causes and consequences of the problem. Multiple sources of data not only provided a more complete picture of student mobility, they also gave us more confidence in our findings because of the remarkable consistency concerning the consequences and causes of student mobility in California.

Below we summarize the major findings from this study regarding the incidence, consequences, and causes of student mobility. We then discuss what action should be taken by students and parents, schools, and state policymakers to address this problem.

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## **THE EXTENT OF STUDENT MOBILITY IN CALIFORNIA**

Our analysis yielded several important findings about the extent of mobility among California students and schools.

**California students, like students in the rest of the U.S., are highly mobile.**

More students from the high school graduating class of 1992 made non-promotional school changes during

their elementary and secondary school careers than remained in a stable pattern of attending a single elementary, middle, and high school. School changes were more common during elementary school than during secondary school. In fact, mobility is the norm during elementary school, while it is the exception during high school.

**Mobility rates are generally higher in California than elsewhere in the nation.**

Almost 75 percent of California students made unscheduled school changes between grades 1 and 12 compared to 60 percent in the rest of the nation.

**Student mobility is prevalent among all ethnic and immigrant groups in California.**

Mobility rates did not vary widely among ethnic and immigrant groups in California. But mobility was clearly related to family income and socioeconomic status—low-income students were more mobile between the 8th and 12th grades than high-income students. Students from single-parent and non-traditional families were also more mobile than students from two-parent households.

**California high schools vary widely in their student mobility rates. In California there are more high schools with extremely high mobility rates than in other states.**

In 1990 the average high school in California saw 22 percent of its 10th grade students leave before completing 12th grade. But some schools had mobility rates much lower than the state average while some schools had much higher mobility rates. One out of five high schools in California had student mobility rates in excess of 30 percent and one out of ten had student mobility rates in excess of 40 percent, compared to six percent in other states. School personnel in such schools and reported that such high rates of mobility greatly impacted their schools and generated considerable chaos for students, teachers, and school administrators.

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## THE EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF STUDENT MOBILITY

Next we examined the educational consequences of mobility for students and for schools, drawing on all four sources of data used in this study—student surveys, school surveys, student and parent interviews, and school interviews. To a large extent, the conclusions drawn from each data source converged—that is, they all told a similar story of how mobility impacts students.

### **Students tend to suffer psychologically, socially, and academically from mobility.**

Many students experience difficulties adjusting to new school settings. Both students and educators reported that transferring to a new school affected their personality or psychological well-being. And although the NELS student survey data did not show any significant differences in self-esteem and locus of control, the differences were in the expected directions, with mobile students reporting lower self-esteem and less self-directed control of their lives.

### **Mobile students often experience difficulty in making new friends and fitting in socially to a new school situation.**

Mobile students in the student surveys reported that they were less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities than stable students. Students and educators who were interviewed confirmed this lower level of involvement, with educators suggesting that this was due in part to poor attendance which reduced the possibility for after-school activities. Possibly as a result, both teachers and students themselves report that mobile students are more likely than other students to act out or to get into trouble in school. Prior research has found that misbehavior and lack of involvement in extracurricular activities increases the risk of dropping out.

### **Mobility hurts students academically.**

There is overwhelming evidence that mobility during high school diminishes the prospects for graduation: students who changed high schools even once were less than half as likely as stable students to graduate from high school, even controlling for other factors that influence high school completion. Our interviews with school personnel revealed some of the reasons why mobile students have trouble finishing—they sometimes get placed in classes that do not contribute to high school completion or they get placed in classes where the curriculum differs from their previous school—a condition referred to as “curricular incoherence.” There was less consistent evidence that mobility had a negative impact on grades and test scores. We had difficulty ascertaining the impacts with the NELS student survey data because so many mobile students were missing test scores in 12th grade. In 10th grade, mobile students had lower test scores, but the differences were only statistically significant in two out of four academic subjects. Interviews with students revealed why the impacts of student mobility on academic achievement were hard to predict: students who made “strategic” school changes to seek a better educational placement, in general, reported positive academic impacts, while students who made “reactive” school changes due to intolerable social or academic situations were more likely to report negative academic impacts from changing schools.

### **Mobility not only impacts students who change schools, it impacts classrooms and schools with mobile students.**

School personnel identified a number of ways that mobile students create chaos and burdens in the classroom as well as in the school. Teachers were adamant about how disruptive and difficult it is to teach in classrooms with constant student turnover. And school administrators reported how time-consuming it is to simply process students when they enter and exit a school. Beyond the administrative costs, school personnel also

identified fiscal impacts that result from mobile students failing to turn in textbooks, and impacts on school climate.

### **Mobility not only hurts mobile students, but also non-mobile students.**

Our statistical analysis of school test scores found that average student test scores for non-mobile students are significantly lower in high schools with high student mobility rates. Since one out of every five urban and suburban high schools in California has a mobility rate in excess of 30 percent, we conclude that a substantial number of students in California are impacted by student mobility. Educators were quick to point out how mobility could affect both mobile and non-mobile students in their schools. They characterized the overall effects of student mobility at the school level as a “chaos” factor that impacts classroom learning activities, teacher morale, and administrative burdens—all of which can impact the learning and achievement of all students in the school. This finding was also consistent with our conceptual framework that guided the study of mobility as a school phenomenon and supported previous studies that have documented the influence of student composition on school outcomes.

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## **THE CAUSES OF STUDENT MOBILITY**

We investigated what causes mobility among students and among schools. Mobility among students arises for a number of reasons. In some cases, families move, requiring students to change schools. In other cases, students and their families may be unhappy with the education they are receiving at one school and change schools in order to find a more suitable education. In still other cases, the schools that students initially attend force them to leave because of academic or social problems, such as poor attendance or getting into fights.

Mobility rates among schools are due, in part, to the mobility among the students that they enroll. Some

schools enroll students who come from families that are more likely to move. But student characteristics only explain some of the differences in mobility rates among schools. Some of the differences are due to the characteristics of the schools themselves, including their resources, policies, and practices.

Again we drew on both survey data and interview data to address this important aspect of the student mobility issue. And again the analysis of these data tended to converge and corroborate each other, leading to several major findings about the causes of mobility among students and schools.

### **Only half of all high school changes are due to families changing residences.**

We examined both the stated reasons students change schools and some predictors of mobility during high school. We found that students change schools for a variety of reasons. Some are family-related. Most of the educators we interviewed believed that residential mobility was responsible for most of the student mobility they observed at their schools. But our analysis of parent survey data in California revealed that only about half of all secondary school changes involved changing residences. Interviews with students and their parents revealed that residential changes are prompted by both economic considerations, such as changing jobs, and by family disruptions, such as divorce or separation.

### **Students themselves often initiate school changes at the high school level, especially in California.**

According to parent survey data, almost half of recent high school changes were initiated by adolescents requesting a change of school. Interview data from students and parents revealed that most of the student initiated changes were reactive rather than strategic in nature—students changed schools to escape a bad situation rather than to actively seek a better situation. Students reported that sometimes they were escaping social isolation or an unsafe school environment; other

times they were escaping what they considered to be a hostile academic environment.

### **Schools often initiate mobility, especially in California.**

Schools can force students to transfer for both social and academic reasons. Fighting or poor grades, for example, can prompt a school to seek an alternative placement for students. Our analysis of parent survey data showed that students in California were much more likely than students in other states to be subjected to school-initiated transfers. This raises the question of why students in California should be subjected to such changes especially in light of our earlier findings that high school changes increase the risk of dropping out.

### **Both student-initiated and school-initiated school changes are prompted by social as well as academic situations.**

Our statistical analysis of the student survey data supported the idea that both social and academic factors contributed to student mobility. For example, school behavior incidents in 8th grade increased the likelihood of high school mobility, while better grades in 8th grade reduced the likelihood of high school mobility. These findings support our study's initial conceptual framework that suggests student mobility, like student dropout, is influenced by student's social and academic engagement in school. Our analysis of interview data modified this initial framework, however: it revealed that although the process of changing schools is often reactive, for some students it can also be a strategic strategy to find a better school environment.

### **One out of every eight students in California is “chronically” mobile, experiencing high mobility through their elementary and second school careers.**

Our statistical analysis revealed that students who made frequent (3 or more) school changes during elementary school (grades 1 through 8) were more likely to change high schools. This means that chronically mobile students attend 6 or 7 schools over a 13 year

period, which hampers their ability to engage in school and greatly increases their risk of school failure.

### **The reasons for changing schools vary among ethnic groups in California.**

Our student and parent interviews revealed differences between Asians, Latinos, and non-Latino whites in the reasons for changing schools: Asians more often made strategic, family-initiated school changes, while African-Americans, Latinos, and non-Latino whites more often made reactive school changes. Our statistical analysis of student survey data also revealed differences between these three groups: Latinos who reported school behavior incidents during 8th grade were more likely to change high schools, even after controlling for the effects of other student and family factors.

### **More of the differences in student mobility rates among California high schools can be explained by school characteristics rather than the characteristics of students enrolled.**

This means that not only students and their families, but also schools are accountable for the high mobility rates found in some California high schools.

### **The composition of students in high schools affects student mobility rates above and beyond the individual effects of student background characteristics.**

In particular, we found that high minority schools had high student mobility rates. This finding is consistent with other empirical studies indicating that student composition affects school performance. Case studies on individual schools suggest that schools with high concentrations of minority students tend to be large, located in poor, urban centers, and have policies that actively promote student turnover. Our interviews with school personnel identified two additional conditions found in large, urban and high-minority schools that could contribute to student turnover: open enrollments and overcrowding. Open enrollment allows students to readily change schools if they can find one with

sufficient space, while overcrowding prompts schools to transfer students even if they wanted to enroll them.

**Finally, school resources and an environment that increases student engagement can reduce student turnover.**

We found that schools with lower student-teacher ratios had lower student mobility rates than other schools, even after controlling for differences in the characteristics of students involved. We also found that schools where students reported doing more homework had lower mobility rates. Both findings suggest that school policies and practices can affect student mobility rates.

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## WHAT SHOULD BE DONE?

What can and should be done about student mobility? The answer to this question depends on how one views this phenomenon. If mobility is viewed largely as a strategic activity initiated by students and their families to serve their own interests and educational preferences, then any response should be directed toward them. And there may be little that can be done to prevent mobility when it is a result of families' decisions to change jobs or residences. In this case, the only response is perhaps to better inform students and parents about the possible problems that can result from changing schools and how to mitigate them.

However, a large share of student mobility, at least during secondary school, is not associated with family residential changes and is not strategic. Rather, both students and schools initiate student transfers in response to social as well as academic concerns. Moreover, there is substantial evidence, both from the data presented in this study and data reported elsewhere, that demonstrates mobility during high school increases the risk of dropping out.

We believe that much can and should be done both to prevent some types of mobility, especially reactive

school changes, and to mitigate some of the harmful effects. We also believe that students' families and schools should help address this problem. Furthermore, the State of California, having a constitutional authority over the state's education system, should be involved in addressing this important educational issue.

There are a number of responses to mobility that could be undertaken by (1) students and their families, (2) schools, and (3) state policymakers.

## What Students and Families Can Do

Although our research found that school changes during high school increase the risk of dropping out, clearly not all school changes are detrimental. In fact, we found that strategic or purposeful school changes can be beneficial. Moreover, students and parents have the right and should have the right to choose the best high school for their needs. But we also found that many times students change schools in reaction to unpleasant or undesirable situations in their school, often in the middle of the academic year. Some of those changes are detrimental. Consequently, we believe there are a number of things that students and parents can do to help prevent "needless" mobility as well as to help to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of mobility.

*1. Attempt to resolve problems at school before initiating a school transfer.*

Our interviews with students found that many times students change schools in reaction to a problematic situation in their school, either a social situation or an academic one. Both students and parents, as well as school officials, often believe that simply by changing schools such problems will be resolved. But students report that such problems are not always worked out. For example, if a student is having difficulty getting along with other students, simply changing schools will not automatically erase this difficulty and further requires a student to adjust to a new school environment.

Therefore, it is probably better in some cases to attempt to resolve the difficulty in the current high school before initiating a transfer.

*2. Make school changes between semesters or at the end of the school year, if possible.*

Teachers report that students who transfer after the beginning of the semester are usually behind other students in their class work, which increases their risk of failure. This may not be the students' fault—we found that students are often put in classes that do not correspond to their previous ones either because appropriate classes were full or because their new school did not take the time to make an appropriate placement. But whatever the reason, transferring in the middle of a semester introduces additional risks. Students can reduce these risks by transferring between semesters or over the summer.

*3. When a transfer is made, parents should personally sign students into their new school and meet with a school counselor. They should also make sure that their child's school records are forwarded in a timely manner from their previous school.*

Students and parents should do everything they can to ease the transition to a new school setting. This includes trying to get appropriate course placements as well as an orientation to their new school setting. One way to accomplish this is to meet with a counselor at their new school immediately after arriving.

*4. Parents should make a follow-up appointment with a school counselor and teachers two or three weeks after a transfer is made to see how their child is adjusting to the new school.*

Adjusting to a new school is often difficult for students. There are psychological, social, and academic challenges to overcome. Parents should monitor closely how their adolescent is adjusting to their new school setting. One way to check on their child's progress is to make a follow-up appointment with a counselor and

some teachers. Of course they can ask their own child about day-to-day experiences as well.

## **What Schools Should Do**

Schools, like students and parents, can work to reduce unnecessary mobility and to mitigate its harmful effects. Potentially the most effective strategy to reduce mobility is to improve the overall quality of the school. By doing so, students and parents are more likely to remain at a school than to leave in search of a more suitable educational environment. Case studies have documented that schools undertaking substantial and meaningful reforms can dramatically reduce their student mobility rate. For example, in a three year period from 1987 to 1990, Hollibrook Accelerated School in Houston, Texas reduced its student mobility rate from 104 percent to 47 percent. Programs that target high-risk students—those who are most likely to leave a school—have also been shown to dramatically reduce student mobility. The ALAS Dropout Prevention program reduced student turnover among the most at-risk Latino students in a Los Angeles area middle school by one-half.

In addition to these large-scale efforts, schools can undertake some specific strategies to help address problems associated with mobility:

*1. Counselors should urge students to remain in the school if at all possible.*

Again, some school changes are unnecessary and detrimental. Counselors can “problem solve” with a withdrawing student about how he or she could remain at least until the year ends—for example, suggesting that students use public transportation if they moved out of the neighborhood or be transported by a family member. Counselors should also require a parent to be present to help resolve these issues.

*2. Counselors and administrators should prepare in advance for incoming transfer students.*

Schools can improve the transition and adjustment of incoming transfer students by planning materials and activities for such students before they arrive. This will not only aid students, but will help reduce the sudden demands that processing such students often requires. Some specific activities that could be undertaken include:

- **Create extra sections of required courses at the beginning of the school year to accommodate the expected increase in transfer students throughout the year.**
- **Make orientation video about the school.**
- **Develop short assessment test for reading, writing and computing as a way to determine which class to assign the student if the student does not bring a transcript.**
- **Create and train a corps of student volunteer coaches who have entered the school late.**
- **Create inviting information packets of extracurricular activities.**
- **Organize students to provide weekly on-going information booths at lunch where they explain the various extracurricular activities and how to join.**

*3. Counselors or administrators should facilitate the transition of incoming transfer students as soon as they arrive.*

Schools can help to mitigate some of the harmful psychological, social, and academic impacts of student mobility. Some specific actions they can take are:

- **Encourage students to enroll in a class without credit to gain experience and then re-enroll for credit at the semester or new year.**
- **Assign a very late-arriving student to independent**

**study where credit can be earned until the new semester or year end.**

- **Urge new students to join extracurricular activities or, if appropriate, a counseling group.**
- **Make an appointment with the transferring student to phone or come by soon after they arrive to discuss how things are going in the new school.**

*4. Schools should establish on-going activities and procedures to address the needs of new students.*

The problems that students face adjusting to a new school can continue for a long time. Therefore, schools need long-term strategies to address these problems if they wish to be successful in engaging and retaining their new students. Some specific actions schools can take include:

- **Provide a “new student” group to meet at lunch.**
- **Provide after hours (evening or Saturday) parent conferencing.**
- **Create referral procedures for new students showing adjustment problems.**
- **Sponsor school-wide “acquaintanceship” contests or activities.**
- **Recruit staff and teachers to mentor a new student who might have difficulties academically or socially.**

*5. High schools should assess the past enrollment history of incoming students, including the number of previous school changes, and closely monitor the educational progress of students with three or more previous school changes.*

Teachers, too, can help the transition and adjustment of new students in their classes. Like counselors and administrators, teachers can take actions before, during, and after the arrival of new students in their classes.

Our findings reveal that students with three or more previous school changes between grades one and eight are much more likely to change high schools and subsequently drop out of school. Therefore, schools should routinely assess the past enrollment history of incoming students in order to identify such students and target interventions for them. The enrollment history should also be used to identify other risk factors such as retention in earlier grades, since those factors also increase the risk of dropping out.

*6. Teachers should prepare in advance to accommodate incoming students.*

Teachers who know they must face a large number of new students in their classes throughout the school year can prepare in advance for their arrival. This will help the students and reduce the immediate demands of dealing with these students at the time of their arrival. Some specific things that teachers can do include:

- **Develop learning packets that give important background information and activities of key units so that when a student comes in the middle of a unit they can try to catch up.**
- **Create a subject matter skills assessment test.**
- **Create a reading comprehension and writing assessment test.**
- **Create a personal information or journal assignment. Develop a list of 5 to 10 personal questions that the student can answer in two pages. This will not only help the teacher know the student better but also provide a sample of writing skills.**
- **Create a short list of class rules and procedures for routine assignments.**

*7. Teachers should facilitate the transition of new students as soon as they arrive.*

Just as counselors and administrators need to take action as soon as new students arrive, so should teachers.

Some specific activities they can do include:

- **Assess the student.**
- **Hand out learning packet.**
- **Introduce the entering student to the class.**
- **Pair the student up with another student for extra help.**
- **Take some time in the first day or two to talk to new students individually to encourage them and welcome them.**
- **Make an appointment at lunch or after class to give the student an orientation.**
- **Introduce new students to others who entered late and who are succeeding.**

*8. Teachers should establish on-going activities and procedures to address the needs of new students.*

Teachers, too, need to develop on-going procedures and practices to ensure the successful transition of new students to their classes. Some specific things they can do include:

- **Read the cum record for grades, attendance and background.**
- **Inform the parent about the class expectations and take the time to discuss with the parent the hazards of changing schools midyear.**
- **Provide tutoring or review before or after school or at lunch.**
- **When teaching, stand near the new student the first week to make sure they are on track.**
- **Look for signs that the student is struggling with the classwork or having problems of social or psychological adjustment. Refer to other professionals as necessary.**

*9. Schools should establish procedures to recover textbooks from withdrawing students.*

We found that schools with high student turnover suffered huge financial losses from withdrawing students who fail to return their textbooks. Although the California Education Code permits school districts to set up a “reasonable” due process to recover non-returned textbooks, many districts have found it difficult to do so and have given up. And the State Attorney General has ruled that districts cannot withhold student records. But schools and districts that have been heavily impacted by mobility need to establish some sort of procedure to recover these books. Schools may want to consider a financial incentive system for students whereby students are given cash awards to return books, which could actually save money over the cost of replacing the textbooks. Districts and even the state could help schools set up such programs.

## **What the State Should Do**

Although student mobility results from the actions of students, families, and schools, the State of California is clearly impacted by this problem. And because the state has constitutional authority for education and provides the majority of funds for local schools, the state has a clear interest in addressing this problem. Below we outline some actions the state might consider.

*1. Require schools to report mobility and completion rates to the State Department of Education.*

One reason so little is known about student mobility in California is that the state does not collect data on the extent of this phenomenon. The State Department of Education currently collects a variety of information from the state’s schools through the California Basic Education Data System (CBEDS). This information includes the number of students who graduate (for high schools) each year and the number of students who drop out grades 7 through 12 each year. We believe

with only modest changes in the reporting requirements of CBEDS, it would be possible for schools to report the total number of students who complete (elementary and middle schools) or graduate (high schools) each year and to disaggregate those numbers by when students first entered the school. This would allow schools to construct cohort **graduation rates** and **cohort mobility rates**. Cohort graduation rates are simply the proportion of students who graduate from a specific entering class or cohort of students. As the U.S. Department of Education points out, cohort graduation rates provide a much better picture of how many students from each grade cohort complete or drop out of school over time. Knowing how many students from each entering grade cohort graduated or completed school would also provide information on the number of students from each cohort who left before completion—that is, the cohort mobility rate. This additional information could also be combined with data on the number of retained students, since the state has recently enacted legislation to change promotion and retention policies that could greatly increase the number of retained students. Because both excessive mobility and retention increase the risk of school dropout, schools should routinely collect data on these two student indicators. These data could also be used to report the number of students from each entering cohort who remain in their school and graduate on time. Finally, some schools may be particularly impacted by mobile students and retained students, which would present particular challenges for those schools and likely have an adverse effect on school performance.

*2. Include mobility rates as a measure of school effectiveness in school accountability and performance reports.*

Indicators of school performance should take into account student mobility. The California Legislature is considering legislation to develop a new way to measure the performance of the state’s public schools in order to rank and categorize them for improvement efforts. Indicators of school performance should take into

account student mobility in two ways. First, schools should be accountable for retaining the students that enter their school. Cohort mobility and graduation rates should be included as a measure of school effectiveness because they reflect the “holding power” of schools—their ability to retain and educate the students who walk in the door. One popular measure of institutional quality in higher education is based, in part, on graduation rates for entering freshman with no distinction between departing students who drop out or transfer to another institution. As with all measures of school effectiveness, it would be necessary to take into account a school’s demographic characteristics that can contribute to school mobility rates. Second, schools should be accountable for the academic achievement of the students they retain. In comparing schools, it is not only important to take into account differences in the socioeconomic status of the students, but also how long the students have been in that school. Schools should be accountable for the achievement of the students they have had the opportunity to educate for a reasonable amount of time.

*3. Hold school districts accountable for the whereabouts of students who leave a school early, particularly students who say they are transferring to another school within the district, to ensure that students actually enroll in another school in a timely fashion.*

Student mobility is a problem, in part, because students who change schools are not monitored in the period between when they leave one school and when they enter another, even within the same district. Currently, no one is accountable for these students during this transition period. Data from an earlier study of student mobility revealed that it is often several weeks before secondary students re-enroll in another school. This unnecessary interruption in a student’s schooling should be addressed. Because school districts are legally responsible for the educational welfare of their students and because most mobility takes place within districts, school districts should be accountable to the state to

minimize the transition time in school transfers.

*4. Require school districts to transmit the students records to the new school in a timely fashion.*

Frequently student records are not delivered to the new school in a timely fashion. Without these records, school personnel at the new school may not be aware of a student’s educational history and services that he or she may need. The State Department of Education is currently working on an electronic student information system, which should facilitate the transfer of student records between school districts. But this system is not expected to be fully operational for a number of years. In an earlier study we found that 80 percent of non-promotional school changes for a cohort of urban Latino students were within the same district. Therefore, districts should be able to facilitate the timely transfer of student records between schools within their own districts before the state system is operational.

*5. Prepare a guidebook for students and parents on mobility that describes the advantages and disadvantages of changing schools and provides information on actions they can take to prepare for the move and ease the transition into a new school.*

At least some mobility could be prevented if students and parents were better informed about the risks and rewards of changing schools. And the transition to a new school could be improved if students and parents knew what to do to facilitate the transition.

*6. Prepare a guidebook for school districts that provides information on actions they can take to reduce unnecessary school transfers and to respond to the needs of transfer students.*

Some schools actively encourage student transfers without considering the educational consequences. And schools may do little to help integrate transfer students into their schools and improve their prospects for academic success. But some schools, both in California and elsewhere in the U.S., have established a variety of

interventions for transfer students including orientation programs and “buddy” programs to help students adjust more quickly and successfully to their new schools. The State Department of Education could investigate the effectiveness of these programs and provide useful information on these programs to schools throughout the state.

*7. Provide funds to schools with high mobility to establish programs that improve the integration of new students in a school.*

The State Department of Education could also provide grants to schools to develop, implement, and evaluate “newcomer” programs in middle and high schools with high mobility.

In conclusion, the State of California is now embarking on a series of educational reforms designed to improve student achievement. But to be successful, these reforms need to recognize and address a range of current problems facing California’s students and schools. Student mobility is one of those problems. It affects one out of every three students and one out every five schools, reducing both student and school performance. And it disproportionately impacts the most disadvantaged students and disadvantaged schools. If the state hopes to improve the educational welfare of those students and schools, the problem of student mobility must be confronted.



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