

Student Mobility

DEFINITION

Student mobility is the number of students who either enrolled in or withdrew from Rhode Island public schools during the school year divided by the number of students in the fall school enrollment.¹

SIGNIFICANCE

Families move for a variety of reasons that may include changes in household structure, parental employment status, an inability to pay the rent, dissatisfaction with neighborhood conditions or a desire to improve overall quality of family life.^{2,3}

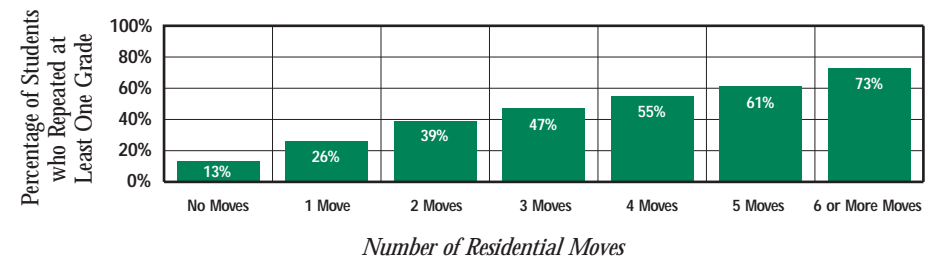
One in six third-grade students in the U.S. has attended at least three schools since the beginning of the first grade.⁴ Student mobility affects both the student and the classroom of which he or she is a member. Changing schools causes a disruption in a child's learning experience and may accentuate learning difficulties if the classroom a child enters is at a different point in the curriculum than the classroom the child left.⁵

Research shows that frequent moves can have a negative effect on school performance, behavior and other areas of child well-being.^{6,7} Strong evidence exists that mobility during both elementary and high school reduces

the chance that a student will graduate.⁸ Teachers in schools with highly mobile students are more likely to have problems accurately assessing the needs of new children, determining their past educational experiences and being able to build on students' previously developed knowledge and skill sets.⁹

Nationally, children under age five, children of color, children living in low-income households or renter households, children whose parents did not complete high school and immigrants have the highest rates of mobility.¹⁰ Children who are English Language Learners (ELL) are more than twice as likely to change schools frequently as those who are non-ELL students.¹¹ Mobility also has a strong relationship to child well-being. Frequent moves are correlated with negative outcomes such as dropping out of school, delinquency, depression, anti-social behavior and teen births.^{12,13}

Students Who Repeated at Least One Grade by Number of Residential Moves, Providence, 1987 - 2001



Source: *Development and use of neighborhood health analysis: Residential mobility in context.* (2002). Providence, RI: The Providence Plan. Data represents the 57,641 children who were enrolled in Providence Schools between 1987 and 2001.

◆ Students in Providence who move often are more likely to repeat a grade. As the number of moves increases, the likelihood of repeating a grade increases. Almost half (47%) of Providence students who moved three times had repeated a grade at least once.¹⁴

Mobility and Education Outcomes in Rhode Island

◆ In Rhode Island, students who move are absent more often than students who do not move. Thirty-one percent of students who did not move missed 16 or more days of school, compared to 42% of students who moved at least once during the same period.¹⁵

◆ Children who move perform worse on standardized tests than children who have not experienced mobility. The more frequent the number of moves the worse the performance. Sixty-six percent of children who have not moved met the 4th Grade Reading Standards, as opposed to 59% of students who moved once, 56% of students who moved twice, and 48% of students who moved three or more times.¹⁶

◆ Rhode Island recently implemented a statewide student identifier system that assigns each student a unique identifying number to track his or her progress through the public school systems. Unique student identifiers allow states to better chart the paths and progress of students, ensure that students are not miscounted as they move between districts and understand the patterns and effects of student mobility.¹⁷ The first complete set of data using the student identifier will be available for the 2004-2005 school year.

Residential Mobility Among Children Ages Birth to Five Years, Core Cities and Rhode Island 1997-2001

Place of Birth	All Births	No Moves	1 Move	2 Moves	3+ Moves
Central Falls	1,692	48%	28%	14%	11%
Newport	1,655	57%	27%	10%	5%
Pawtucket	4,778	59%	25%	10%	6%
Providence	13,182	51%	27%	13%	9%
West Warwick	1,967	63%	24%	9%	4%
Woonsocket	2,683	52%	28%	12%	9%
Core Cities	13,877	53%	27%	12%	8%
Remainder of State	24,590	74%	20%	4%	2%
Rhode Island	38,467	65%	23%	8%	4%

Source: *Development and use of neighborhood health analysis: Residential mobility in context.* (2002). Providence, RI: The Providence Plan.

◆ Between 1997 and 2001 in Rhode Island, 53% of children ages birth to five in the core cities did not experience residential moves, as compared to 74% of children ages birth to five in the remainder of the state and 65% of children in Rhode Island as a whole.¹⁸

◆ Central Falls (25%), Providence (22%), and Woonsocket (21%) have the highest percentage of children under six years of age who have moved more than once.¹⁹

◆ Rhode Island children born to teen mothers, single mothers or mothers with less than a high school diploma are most likely to experience residential mobility.²⁰

References for Indicator

¹ Data on student mobility in Rhode Island for elementary school, middle school and high school will be available for the 2004-2005 school year.

² *Why people move: Exploring the March 2000 Current Population Survey: March 1999 to March 2000.* (2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

³ *Counting on ourselves: The Providence Demography Initiative/A first portrait: Schools* (1999). Providence, RI: The Providence Blueprint for Education (PROBE) and The Providence Plan.

^{4,9,11} *Elementary school children: Many change school frequently, harming their education.* (1994). Washington, DC: U.S. General Accounting Office.

⁵ Kerbow, D. (October 1996). *Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform: A technical report.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for the Social Organization of Schools.

⁶ *Kids Mobility Project report.* (2002). Minneapolis, MN: Family Housing Fund.

^{7,13} Scanlon, E., & Devine, K. (2001). Residential mobility and youth well-being: Research, policy and practice Issues. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, XXVIII(1), 119-138.

⁸ Rumberger, R. W. (2002) Student mobility and academic achievement. *Eric Digest (EDO-PS-02-1)*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.

◆ A study of Rhode Island children under age 6 found that residentially-mobile children have fewer office visits and less contact with any physician than other young children. As the number of moves increases, the likelihood that a child will not have a consistent primary care provider also increases.²¹

◆ Increased mobility can affect the emotional and behavioral well-being of children. Children who move frequently find it difficult to maintain relationships with old friends and may develop feelings of loneliness, abandonment, helplessness and a fear of the unknown.²²

◆ One study found that conduct disorders, emotional disorders and hyperactivity were more prevalent among children ages four to sixteen who moved two or more times in a two-year period than among children moving once or not at all. More longitudinal data are required to explore the relationship between mobility and mental health disorders.²³

Mobility and Health Outcomes

¹⁰ *Geographical mobility - population characteristics: March 1999 to March 2000.* (2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

¹² *Trends in the well-being of America's children and youth.* (2002). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

^{14,15,16,18,19,20,21} *Development and use of neighborhood health analysis: Residential mobility in context.* (2002). Providence, RI: The Providence Plan. Data represents the Providence Plan's analysis of data from the Providence School Department student enrollment databases, the Rhode Island Department

of Elementary and Secondary Education standardized test scores and the Rhode Island Department of Health Kidsnet databases.

¹⁷ Hamilton, L. S. (2002). *Benefits of a statewide student identifier system for California.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

^{22,23} Mobility in Hamilton Wentworth. (1999). The "Keeping score" on Kids in Hamilton Reporting Project. Ontario, Canada: Offord Centre for Child Studies. Retrieved from www.offeredcentre.com/keepscore/report.html.