

# 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.<sup>1</sup>

## 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.<sup>2,3</sup>

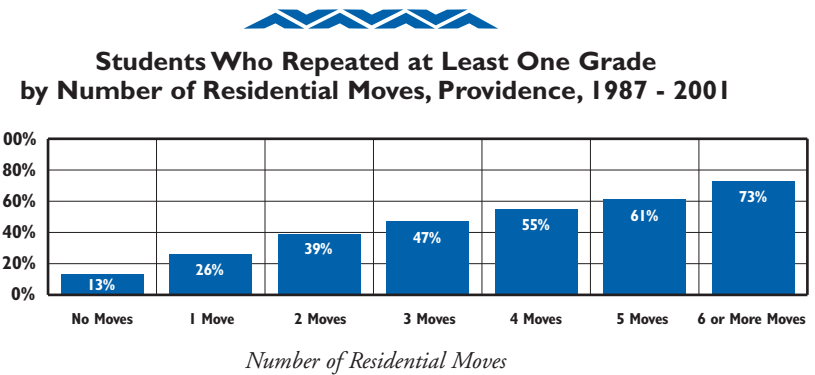
One in six third-grade students in the U.S. has attended at least three schools since the beginning of the first grade.<sup>4</sup> Student mobility affects both the student and the classrooms they attend. Changing schools causes a disruption in a child's learning experience and may accentuate learning difficulties if the child enters a classroom at a different point in the curriculum than in their previous school.<sup>5</sup>

Research shows that frequent moves can have a negative effect on school performance, behavior and may affect other areas of child well-being.<sup>6,7</sup> 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 the student's knowledge and skills.<sup>8</sup>

Nationally, children under age five, children of color, children living in low-income households or renter households and immigrants have the highest rates of mobility.<sup>9</sup> Children who are English Language Learners (ELL) are more than twice as likely to change schools frequently as are non-ELL students.<sup>10</sup> Mobility also has a strong relationships 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.<sup>11,12</sup>

Percentage of Students who Repeated at Least One Grade



Source: *Development and Use of Neighborhood Health Analysis: Residential Mobility in Context* (October 30, 2002). Providence, RI: The Providence Plan. Data represent 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 3 times had repeated a grade at least once. Almost three-quarters (73%) of children who moved 6 times had repeated a grade at least once.<sup>13</sup>

## Mobility and Education Outcomes in Rhode Island

- ◆ In Rhode Island, students who move are absent more often than students that do not move. Thirty-one percent of students that did not move missed 16 or more days of school, compared to 42% of students that moved at least once during the same period.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Children that move perform worse on standardized tests than children that have not experienced mobility. The more frequent the number of moves the worse the performance. Based on a 2002 study by the Providence Plan, 66% 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.<sup>15</sup>

## 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*. (October 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.<sup>16</sup>

◆ 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.<sup>17</sup>

◆ Of all young children in Rhode Island, those born to teen mothers, single mothers or mothers with less than a high school diploma are most likely to experience residential mobility.<sup>18</sup>

## Mobility and Health Outcomes

◆ 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.<sup>19</sup>

◆ 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.<sup>20</sup>

◆ 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.<sup>21</sup>

### References for Indicator

<sup>1</sup> Data on student mobility in Rhode Island for elementary school, middle school, and high school are not available for the 2002-2003 school year, but will be reported in future years.

<sup>2</sup> *Why People Move: Exploring the March 2000 Current Population Survey: March 1999 to March 2000*. (May 2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

<sup>3</sup> *Counting on Ourselves: The Providence Demography Initiative/A First Portrait: Schools*. (1999). Providence, RI: The Providence Blueprint for Education (PROBE) and The Providence Plan.

<sup>4,8,10</sup> *Elementary School Children: Many Change School Frequently, Harming Their Education*. (February 1994). Washington, DC: U.S. General Accounting Office.

<sup>5</sup> Kerbow, D. (October 1996). *Patterns of Urban Student Mobility and Local School Reform: A Technical Report*. Baltimore, MD: Center for the Social Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University.

<sup>6</sup> *Kids Mobility Project Report*. (January 2002). Minneapolis, MN: Family Housing Fund.

<sup>7,12</sup> Scanlon, E. and Devine, K. (March 2001). Residential Mobility and Youth Well-Being: Research, Policy and Practice Issues. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, Vol. XXVIII, Number 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Geographical Mobility - Population Characteristics: March 1999 to March 2000*. (May 2001). Washington, DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.

<sup>11</sup> *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.

<sup>13,14,15,16,17,18,19</sup> *Development and Use of Neighborhood Health Analysis: Residential Mobility in Context*. (October 30, 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.

<sup>20,21</sup> *Mobility*. (December 1999). "Keeping Score" on Kids in Hamilton-Wentworth. Canada: Canadian Centre for Studies of Children at Risk.