

# Student Mobility

## DEFINITION

*Student mobility* is the number of students who enrolled in school after September 30 or withdrew from school before June 1 divided by the total enrollment for that school district.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Student mobility is associated with lower academic performance, behavior difficulties, lower levels of school engagement, and increased risk of dropping out of high school. Changing schools can disrupt learning, negatively impact a student's achievement, and cause social upheaval for children. Student mobility also can lead to less active parent involvement in their children's schools.<sup>1,2</sup>

Students who change schools frequently are more likely to have lower math and reading skills, more likely to repeat a grade, more likely to be suspended, and less likely to graduate from high school than their non-mobile peers.<sup>3,4</sup>

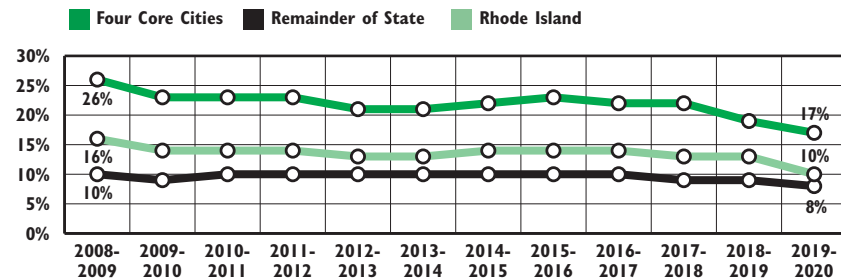
Regardless of income status and ethnicity, mobility can negatively affect student achievement. However, low-income students and Students of Color are more likely to be mobile and experience greater negative impacts on their academic achievement, than higher-income students and white students. Students receiving special education services also are likely to be negatively impacted by changing schools.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

High mobility rates in schools can negatively impact all students because teachers must slow curriculum progress, repeat lessons, and adjust to changing classroom dynamics and student needs. Within-year moves are particularly disruptive for students, teachers, and schools.<sup>8,9</sup>

Families may move their children to a different school because they are dissatisfied with the school, concerned about their child's safety, or moving due to changes in family circumstances. Changes in family circumstances can be either positive or negative, including eviction or foreclosure, divorce or marriage, job loss or job changes, death in the family, or a desire to improve quality of life. Mobile students who are low-income and Students of Color are more likely to change schools due to negative life events than mobile students who are higher-income and white.<sup>10,11</sup>

Between 2015 and 2019 in Rhode Island, 10% of children ages five to 17 changed residence at least once during the previous year, 76% of whom moved within Rhode Island and 24% of whom moved from another state or abroad.<sup>12</sup> Nationally and in Rhode Island, people with incomes below the poverty line are more likely to move than higher-income residents. Between 2015 and 2019, 21% of Rhode Islanders living below the poverty line moved, compared with 10% of higher-income residents.<sup>13</sup>

  
**Student Mobility Rates, Rhode Island,  
2008-2009 through 2019-2020 School Years**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2008-2009 through 2019-2020 school years. The four core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket. In the 2010 and 2011 Factbooks, the core cities included Newport and West Warwick, so the mobility rates reported in those Factbooks may differ from the ones included here.

- ◆ The student mobility rate in Rhode Island decreased from 16% in the 2008-2009 school year to 10% in the 2019-2020 school year. The mobility rate for the four core cities continues to be more than twice the mobility rate of the remainder of the state.<sup>14</sup>
- ◆ School districts with high mobility rates can reduce the negative effects of mobility on students by providing immediate and comprehensive screening of entering students and by identifying other districts where students most frequently transfer to and from and aligning their curricula, programs, and policies to reduce learning disruption.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ One-third of children in foster care will experience five or more school changes before they turn age 18. The federal *Every Student Succeeds Act* includes provisions to give children in foster care more educational stability by allowing students to stay in their school of origin if it is in their best interest and providing transportation to that school.<sup>16</sup>

  
**Student Mobility and COVID-19**

- ◆ Nationally, many parents have made changes in their children's school enrollment due to remote learning and uncertainty during the pandemic, including decisions to homeschool or transfer to a private school.<sup>17</sup>
- ◆ Surveys of teachers and parents conducted during the fall of 2020 have found significant changes in students entering and leaving during the first couple of months of the school year, and more school changes not related to a move.<sup>18</sup>

Table 46. Student Mobility and Stability Rates by District, Rhode Island, 2019-2020 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	CUMULATIVE ENROLLMENT FOR 2019-2020	# ENROLLED THE WHOLE YEAR	# ENROLLED AFTER SEPT. 30	# EXITED BEFORE JUNE 1	STABILITY RATE	MOBILITY RATE
Barrington	3,461	3,340	66	58	97%	4%
Bristol Warren	3,240	3,016	67	171	93%	7%
Burrillville	2,279	2,146	60	77	94%	6%
Central Falls	3,024	2,491	263	303	82%	19%
Charlho	3,233	3,055	68	116	94%	6%
Coventry	4,674	4,301	151	238	92%	8%
Cranston	10,948	9,918	490	583	91%	10%
Cumberland	4,837	4,425	168	266	91%	9%
East Greenwich	2,573	2,499	35	40	97%	3%
East Providence	5,196	4,811	170	231	93%	8%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,628	1,550	35	43	95%	5%
Foster	218	210	*	*	96%	4%
Foster-Glocester	1,386	1,324	24	45	96%	5%
Glocester	567	547	10	12	96%	4%
Jamestown	493	443	26	27	90%	11%
Johnston	3,310	2,984	133	206	90%	10%
Lincoln	3,254	3,040	111	114	93%	7%
Little Compton	225	216	*	*	96%	4%
Middletown	2,290	2,029	122	155	89%	12%
Narragansett	1,229	1,155	37	38	94%	6%
New Shoreham	137	131	*	*	96%	5%
Newport	2,271	1,971	154	164	87%	14%
North Kingstown	4,037	3,789	117	142	94%	6%
North Providence	3,715	3,398	174	153	91%	9%
North Smithfield	1,667	1,595	31	43	96%	4%
Pawtucket	9,310	8,017	617	747	86%	15%
Portsmouth	2,483	2,320	74	96	93%	7%
Providence	26,074	21,942	1,829	2,596	84%	17%
Scituate	1,242	1,180	31	36	95%	5%
Smithfield	2,407	2,313	40	56	96%	4%
South Kingstown	2,906	2,753	68	91	95%	5%
Tiverton	1,796	1,682	47	73	94%	7%
Warwick	8,766	8,059	295	442	92%	8%
West Warwick	3,817	3,346	205	286	88%	13%
Westerly	2,620	2,450	68	107	94%	7%
Woonsocket	6,585	5,563	440	643	84%	16%
Charter Schools	9,367	8,708	251	419	93%	7%
State-Operated Schools	1,826	1,690	49	89	93%	8%
UCAP	145	122	14	10	84%	17%
Four Core Cities	44,993	38,013	3,149	4,289	84%	17%
Remainder of State	92,905	85,996	3,086	4,124	93%	8%
Rhode Island	149,236	134,529	6,549	8,931	90%	10%



## Student Mobility and Stability Rates

◆ Mobility rates are calculated by adding all children who enrolled after September 30 to all those who withdrew before June 1 and dividing the total by the total enrollment for that school district.<sup>19</sup>

◆ Stability rates measure the number of children who attended the same school the entire school year in a school district. The stability rate is calculated by dividing the number of children enrolled the whole year at the same school in the school district by total enrollment for that school district. The stability rate for the four core cities was 84% in the 2019-2020 school year, compared with a stability rate of 93% in the remainder of the state.<sup>20</sup>

◆ Total enrollment for each district is cumulative over the course of the school year.<sup>21</sup>

◆ The overall Rhode Island student mobility rate was 10% in the 2019-2020 school year. The four core cities had a higher mobility rate (17%) than districts in the remainder of the state (8%).<sup>22</sup>

◆ During the 2019-2020 school year, Rhode Island high schools had higher mobility rates (12%) than elementary schools (10%) and middle schools (10%).<sup>23</sup>

### Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2019-2020 school year.

\*Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

Charter schools include: Achievement First Rhode Island, Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, The Charette Charter School, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, The Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, Segue Institute for Learning, Sheila C. "Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, South Side Elementary Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and the Village Green Virtual Public Charter School.

State-operated schools include: William M. Davies Career & Technical High School, DCYF Schools, Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical High School, and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

### References

- <sup>1,3</sup> Herbers, J. E., Reynolds, A. J., & Chen, C. (2013). School mobility and developmental outcomes in young adulthood. *Development and Psychopathology*, 25(2), 501–515.
- <sup>2,4,5,8</sup> Scherrer, J. (2013). The negative effects of student mobility: Mobility as a predictor, mobility as a mediator. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, 8(1), 1–14.
- <sup>6</sup> Rumberger, R. W. (2015). *Student mobility: Causes, consequences, and solutions*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.
- <sup>7,9,10</sup> Fiel, J. E., Haskins, A. R., & López Turley, R. N. (2013). Reducing school mobility: A randomized trial of a relationship-building intervention. *American Education Research Journal*, 50(6), 1188–1218.

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