

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.^{1,2}

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.^{3,4}

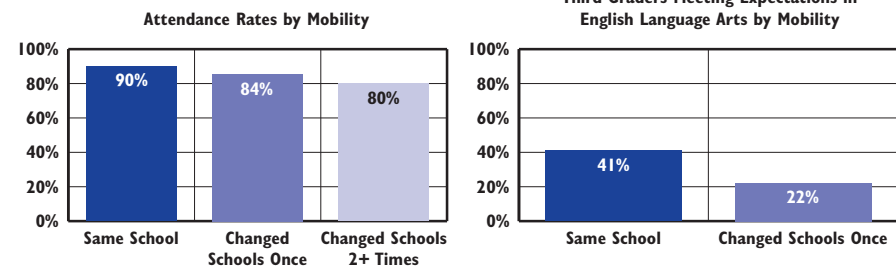
Regardless of income status and ethnicity, mobility can negatively affect student achievement. However, low-income children and Children of Color are more likely to be mobile and experience greater negative impacts on their academic achievement, than higher-income and white students. Students receiving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

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.^{8,9}

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.^{10,11}

Between 2016 and 2020 in Rhode Island, 9% of children ages five to 17 changed residence at least once during the previous year, 75% of whom moved within Rhode Island and 25% of whom moved from another state or abroad.¹² Nationally and in Rhode Island, people with incomes below the poverty line are more likely to move than higher-income residents. Between 2016 and 2020, 19% of Rhode Islanders living below the poverty line moved, compared with 10% of higher-income residents.¹³

School Mobility and Education Outcomes in Rhode Island, 2020-2021



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021 school year. Fewer than 10 3rd graders who changed schools 2+ times were tested for 3rd grade ELA so this data cannot be reported.

- ◆ Rhode Island students who change schools mid-year are absent more often than students who do not change schools. Rhode Island students who did not change schools had a 90% attendance rate, compared with 84% for those who changed schools once and 80% for those who changed schools two or more times during the 2020-2021 school year.¹⁴
- ◆ Children who change schools mid-year also perform worse on standardized tests than children who have not experienced school mobility. During the 2020-2021 school year in Rhode Island, 41% of third-grade children who did not experience mobility met expectations in reading/writing on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)* state assessment, compared with 22% of students who moved once.¹⁵
- ◆ School districts with high mobility rates can reduce the negative effects of mobility on students by providing immediate and comprehensive screening of entering students to ensure that students are properly placed. Districts also can identify other districts where students most frequently transfer to and from and align their curricula, programs, and policies to reduce learning disruption.¹⁶
- ◆ One-third of children in foster care will experience five or more school changes before they turn age 18, and such changes often result in lost academic progress. 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.¹⁷

Table 46. Student Mobility and Stability Rates by District, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year

SCHOOL DISTRICT	CUMULATIVE ENROLLMENT FOR 2020-2021	# ENROLLED THE WHOLE YEAR	# ENROLLED AFTER SEPT. 30	# EXITED BEFORE JUNE 1	STABILITY RATE	MOBILITY RATE
Barrington	3,405	3,306	48	52	97%	3%
Bristol Warren	3,112	2,967	74	79	95%	5%
Burrillville	2,151	2,029	54	68	94%	6%
Central Falls	2,961	2,334	355	314	79%	23%
Charlho	3,202	2,948	113	145	92%	8%
Coventry	4,481	4,121	166	222	92%	9%
Cranston	10,758	9,857	435	506	92%	9%
Cumberland	4,727	4,366	199	179	92%	8%
East Greenwich	2,581	2,430	81	79	94%	6%
East Providence	5,024	4,683	149	201	93%	7%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,559	1,496	37	29	96%	4%
Foster	223	196	18	*	88%	12%
Foster-Glocester	1,404	1,351	17	38	96%	4%
Glocester	555	518	26	11	93%	7%
Jamestown	466	438	16	12	94%	6%
Johnston	3,163	2,860	128	189	90%	10%
Lincoln	3,275	3,048	115	119	93%	7%
Little Compton	213	197	10	*	92%	8%
Middletown	2,153	1,875	132	163	87%	14%
Narragansett	1,199	1,111	36	55	93%	8%
New Shoreham	155	141	*	*	91%	9%
Newport	2,088	1,839	112	147	88%	12%
North Kingstown	3,967	3,725	103	149	94%	6%
North Providence	3,622	3,338	152	143	92%	8%
North Smithfield	1,657	1,547	66	45	93%	7%
Pawtucket	8,915	7,766	595	605	87%	13%
Portsmouth	2,364	2,216	76	76	94%	6%
Providence	27,937	18,252	4,899	5,653	65%	38%
Scituate	1,236	1,157	37	44	94%	7%
Smithfield	2,386	2,303	48	39	97%	4%
South Kingstown	2,787	2,586	77	127	93%	7%
Tiverton	1,726	1,589	54	88	92%	8%
Warwick	8,339	7,699	273	380	92%	8%
West Warwick	3,768	3,278	224	302	87%	14%
Westerly	2,467	2,282	89	101	93%	8%
Woonsocket	6,225	5,261	460	565	85%	16%
Charter Schools	9,938	9,411	235	299	95%	5%
State-Operated Schools	1,974	1,709	137	179	87%	16%
UCAP	147	111	28	*	76%	24%
Four Core Cities	46,038	33,613	6,309	7,137	73%	29%
Remainder of State	90,213	83,497	3,172	3,810	93%	8%
Rhode Island	148,310	128,341	9,881	11,433	87%	14%

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.¹⁸

◆ 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 73% in the 2020-2021 school year, compared with a stability rate of 93% in the remainder of the state.¹⁹

◆ Total enrollment for each district is cumulative over the course of the school year.²⁰

◆ The overall Rhode Island student mobility rate was 14% in the 2020-2021 school year. The student mobility rate in the four core cities (29%) was more than three times higher than the rate for districts in the remainder of the state (8%).²¹

◆ During the 2020-2021 school year, Rhode Island elementary schools had higher mobility rates (17%) than middle schools (8%) and high schools (16%).²²

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021 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, SouthSide Elementary Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and 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

- ^{1,3} Herbers, J. E., Reynolds, A. J., & Chen, C. (2013). School mobility and developmental outcomes in young adulthood. *Development and Psychopathology*, 25(2), 501–515.
- ^{2,4,5,8} 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.
- ⁶ Rumberger, R. W. (2015). *Student mobility: Causes, consequences, and solutions*. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center.
- ^{7,9,10} 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.

(continued on page 189)