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Missouri's Missing Education Policy: Support Systems for Districts with High Student Mobility Rates

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Missouri's Missing Education Policy:
Support Systems for Districts with High Student Mobility Rates

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Introduction

In the United States families move, and they move frequently. According to the United States Census Bureau, “Between 2012 and 2013, 35.9 million people 1 year and over living in the United States moved to a different residence” (Ihrke, 2014, p. 1). Typically, these moves include children having to change schools which creates issues that the state of Missouri and local school districts must handle.

Children moving in and out of the classroom at unexpected times not only impacts children, but also negatively impacts school districts, staff and current students. High mobility disproportionately impacts schools with a high poverty rate which creates a need for policy centered on this topic. Student mobility, defined for this policy paper, includes students who change schools after the normal school term has already begun.

Negative Impacts on Districts

School districts in Missouri receive state funding based on the State Basic Aid Formula that partially includes the number of students in attendance on a specific day, designated by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (DESE). When a new student arrives at a school after this formula has already generated the District’s financial aid based on enrollment numbers, districts suffer financially. Mike Fulton, Superintendent of Pattonville School District (personal communication, February 24, 2016), explained how mobile students have negatively impacted his district financially. Drummond Elementary School, population of 600 K-5 students, has a student mobility rate of 40%. Typically, these students arrive two to three years behind grade level academically and have social concerns. In order to best serve these students, he had

to hire additional support staff and Reading Specialists. Hiring additional personnel created a financial burden on the district due to these students not being factored into the original enrollment number reported to DESE. In addition to personnel, other costs to the district included providing transportation, curriculum materials and supplies.

Research strongly indicates that schools that lose accreditation status have a higher rate of student mobility (see Messiou, 2015; Rumberger, 2015; Thompson, 2011; and Voigt, 2012). The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) requires districts to submit enrollment data on each student but do not track student mobility. Missouri's accreditation process for quality schools relies upon accurate district data and performance benchmarks. Without knowing precisely who the children are within a district receiving the educational program consistently, it is impossible for districts or the state to judge fairly the effectiveness of its overall educational program.

Negative Impacts on Schools

Schools with high rates of student mobility typically do not retain quality teachers. Teacher morale is impacted by the constant demand to address the academic and social needs of new students as well as current students. Lesson rigor levels tend to be basic as the classroom teacher attempts to catch up students just arriving while moving through required district curriculum in preparation for high stakes testing. The best teachers, at no fault of their own, get worn down and choose to leave.

Additionally, other school staff is impacted due to the needs of these transient students. Records must be obtained from the previous school and then previous student support programs must be offered. Transportation must be arranged if bussing is offered.

If needed, medical or counseling services must be taken care of. All of these services require attention from a variety of personnel.

Negative Impacts on Students

Children tend to create friendships as soon as the school year begins. When a new child arrives, the other children may or may not welcome them. A child arriving after the school term has begun has to adjust to new surroundings, people and academics that may be well beyond where he was in his prior school. Current students may resent the ongoing interruption in their learning and become frustrated. All students are impacted by student mobility, not just the new arrivals.

Defining and Measuring Student Mobility in Missouri

All of these examples demonstrate the importance of addressing student mobility in Missouri. These issues tied to student mobility concern all Missouri stakeholders with a legitimate interest in education including students and parents, school personnel at all levels and policymakers.

Presently, DESE has neither a fixed definition nor a consistent method of calculating student mobility rates. Without a policy in place with a fixed definition and consistent calculating formula, the impact of student mobility cannot be measured accurately. DESE needs to define, collect and report school and district student mobility rates to recognize the importance of student mobility and how it impacts student achievement.

Districts need this policy and an adequate tracking system to address the multiple negative consequences aligned to high student mobility rates in schools. Additional district or school policy needs to address what should occur when a new student arrives in the district to provide a support system for everyone. Stakeholders must come together and address each consequence to formulate a usable policy.

Overview of Current Knowledge

In 2000, the National Assessment of Education Progress conducted a survey with students in grades 4, 8, and 12 to determine how often they had changed schools in the previous two years. In grade 4, 35% of students had changed schools at least once, with 19% making one change, 7% making two changes, and 9% making three or more changes. In grade 8, 21% had changed schools at least once, with 12% making one change, 4% making two changes, and 4% making three or more changes. In grade 12, 9% had changed schools at least once, with 6% making one change, 2% making two changes, and 1% making three or more changes (Rumberger, 2015, p. 2). Conventional wisdom suggests that parents who have a choice will relocate their students early in their school careers but are reluctant to do so in the high school years. More research probably needs to be done to understand this phenomenon, and how parents make moving decisions related to school-age children.

Chief state school officers from the Central Region voiced a common concern about student mobility, but needed help determining the extent of student mobility in their own states. Researchers at the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance Institute of Education Sciences (NCEE) (IES) were hired to define

and analyze data on student mobility for Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming. In their study, student mobility was defined as students who enter and leave school other than at the beginning or end of the school year. Student mobility rates were calculated based on each state's formula for calculating student mobility percentage, which demonstrates the inconsistency on how data is created (Beesley, Moore, & Gopalani, 2010, p.3).

States vary on how they measure student mobility. In the study they found that some states measure by districts, while others measure by school. The latest measure of student mobility available in Missouri was at the district level and included only students in grades 9-12 during 2007/2008. Researchers from the NCEE IES used the following as Missouri's mobility formula: $\text{Number of unscheduled student district entrances} + \text{number of unscheduled student district exits} / \text{District total student count}$ (Beesley, Moore, & Gopalani, 2010, p. 2).

The data revealed, "14 Missouri districts had student mobility percentages higher than 56.3 percent, 2 standard deviations above the state mean of 24.9 percent. Of these, 11 reported higher eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch than the state average (39.5 percent) (Beesley, Moore, & Gopalani, 2010, p. 9). This data confirms a significant number of high schools and students are impacted by student mobility in Missouri. Clearly, the most important point of this study reveals that schools with the highest mobility rates also have the highest rates of students on free and reduced-price lunches. Also of interest is that these 14 districts are a mix of urban and rural communities throughout Missouri.

For the purposes of this Literature Review, most researchers define mobility as students moving between schools and districts for reasons other than grade promotion (O'Donnell & Gazos, 2006; Rumberger, 2015; Messiou & Jones, 2015).

The Causes of Student Mobility

Students change schools for a variety of reasons. Some are voluntary and some are not. Residential moves that necessitate a school move may occur for positive reasons, such as school choice (open-enrollment), family move (promotional) or negative ones, such as family move (lost job; lost home; eviction; homelessness); student changed families (for reasons of death, divorce, foster care placement, adult or juvenile incarceration) (Rumberger, 2015; Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012; Voight, Shinn, & Nation, 2012; Dauter & Fuller, 2011; Rhodes, 2008; Schafft, 2006).

School changes instigated by parents seeking better school quality or a better fit for their children, such as a language immersion, particular academic programming or Charter School, may or may not also involve a residential move (Rumberger, 2015). Dauter and Fuller (2011) note, "Rising rates of mobility are to be expected as charter, magnet, and pilot schools spread" (p.2). Mobility may be related to special education placement, for example to a setting designed to handle students with particular needs.

Negative reasons for moving were typically not the choice by parents and students, but a consequence of other factors. One study (Schafft, 2006) conducted in a rural New York district included interviews with parents representing 109 moves. Parents were asked to share the reason for moving. Seventy-eight percent of the reasons identified that leaving was not the choice of the parent but factors forced them to move.

Reasons shared included eviction, bad housing conditions, too expensive, bad neighborhood, domestic violence, break up of relationships, conflicts with neighbors, drug abuse in home, incarceration, and lost job. Interviews revealed that the forced move was not always the fault of the parents, “several parents reported they were evicted not because they had failed to pay the rent on time, but because the landlord/property owner had not paid the mortgage and the bank foreclosed, resulting in a sheriff’s eviction for the tenants” (p. 225).

Other negative reasons for changing schools may be school initiated. Transfers may occur due to a school closing, school opening, boundary changes or overcrowding (Rumberger, 2015; Dauter & Fuller, 2011). School district policy may include moving students to an alternative learning center based on behavior violations (Rumberger, 2015).

Displacement caused by a natural disaster or moves parents make in search of safety from a dangerous neighborhood may result in a student changing schools. Study by Rhodes (2008) described students’ experiences for changing schools such as this experience shared by a student, “Actually, we didn’t know right away that we were going to move, but things got kind of dangerous, so we had to move, kind of abruptly, and we ended up packing in one night. Really, we had to get out of there” (p. 116). Mobile students are not only dealing with a change of schools or residence but also the aftereffects of fear and neighborhood violence.

Consequences of Student Mobility

A great deal of research exists on the topic of ‘student mobility’ but researchers have found it difficult to determine if the school change is the only determining factor of the consequences. Rumberger (2015) explains, “The reasons students transfer, such as family disruptions or problems at school, can also influence subsequent student outcomes even without a school transfer. As a result, it is hard to accurately assess the causal impact of student mobility” (p. 7).

During the Great Recession from 2007 – 2009 with its impact on housing mortgages, families in large numbers started losing their homes and being forced to change schools, especially in low-income communities with a predominance of renter vs. owner households. Stakeholders became concerned about the impact on children’s learning which prompted the United States Senate to request the General Accountability Office to conduct a study of the incidence and effects of student mobility (United States Government Accountability Office, 2010). This report confirmed the negative impact of students changing schools, “With respect to academic outcomes, while research suggests that the academic achievement of students is affected by a set of interrelated factors that includes socio-economic status and parental education, there is evidence that mobility has an effect on achievement apart from these factors” (p. 16).

Student Academic Loss in the Early Years

In 2009, a group of prominent U.S. foundations provided funds for the National Research Council (NRC) to assemble a workshop to “review research on the patterns of change and mobility in the lives of young children (ages 3 to 8 years) and to examine the

implications of this work for the design of child care, early childhood and elementary educational programs, and community services for neighborhoods and vulnerable populations that experience high rates of mobility” (Beatty, 2010, p.2).

At this workshop, Burkam, Lee, & Dwyer’s (2009) shared results of their study examining the academic impact of kindergarten students who started school after the beginning of the school year:

Changing schools during the kindergarten year leads to a higher risk of immediate grade retention. Only 4% of children who remain in the same school for the entire kindergarten year are not promoted to first grade whereas 12% of kindergartners who change schools during the year are not promoted to first grade. A multivariate logistic regression model confirms that kindergartners who change schools are less likely to be promoted, even after controlling for other child and family characteristics.
(p.25)

Lack of Curriculum Alignment

School districts make curriculum and academic resource decisions locally, so when a student moves into a new district, learning is impacted. Lack of curriculum alignment between districts provides frustration for students and teachers as shared by this student in an interview by Rhodes (2008), “A lot of times when you transfer to a different school, sometimes they can’t match your courses, and sometimes they can, and even if they do, they’re in different places than you were, like in English, they’re reading a different book, or they’ve read three and you’ve only read two. And you have to catch up to

survive. Like now, I have to do the work that they're doing now, and do the work that they did before I came" (p. 121). A study of 2,913 third grade students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools by McEachin (2005) also concluded that mobile students are negatively impacted by unfamiliarity with classroom resources. Findings included, "Third grade students who transferred into schools that used the same reading textbook series were found to have significantly higher FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test) reading scores than third graders who transferred into schools that used different reading textbooks" (p. vii).

Less Rigorous Lessons Being Taught

Classrooms with a high student mobility rate also affect the rigor of education being offered to the "stable students". Teachers feeling the impact of meeting the needs of the mobile students as well as the entire student body shared, "when new students arrive, it can sometimes affect the pace of instruction for the entire classroom, as teachers attend to the needs of a new student...there may be differences in what and how instruction has been delivered...the order in which course material is taught varies from school to school" (United States Government Accountability Office, 2010, p. 17). Teachers tend to keep lessons at basic levels to compensate for constant change in lesson preparation, thus reducing the rigor of lessons for all students.

Negative State Test Results

Studies reveal the connection of mobile students with negative state academic test results. Engec (2006) analyzed results of the 1998-1999 ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) in the state of Louisiana to determine the impact of frequent moves on students' academic

testing and reported, “As the number of moves increased, the performance of students on the achievement test decreased. The ITBS scores for students who did not move were significantly greater than for students who moved once; ITBS scores for students who moved once were significantly greater than those who moved twice” (p. 171).

Additionally, a study by Wolk (2009) of 4,320 8th grade students in Santa Ana Unified School District found that “mobile students and highly mobile (moved more than two times over three years) had lower over-all performance on the California Standards Test (CST) in English language arts and mathematics than their stable peers” (p. 2). The United States Government Accountability Office (2010) reported that, “a national study that tracked high school age students found that changing high schools was associated with lower performance on math and reading tests” (p.16).

Impact on School Accreditation

Based on the research indicating that students with higher rates of mobility do not achieve at the same rate as stable students, state assessment results become a hot topic. State Departments of Education use academic data as one of its measures for rating the quality of schools. In Georgia, a study was conducted to analyze student mobility and first through fifth grade reading, language arts, and mathematics achievement for a statewide sample of 1,062 elementary schools. Findings by Thompson, Meyers, & Oshimas (2011) indicated, “moderate, negative correlations between achievement across grade levels and subject areas; modest, negative correlations between achievement and mobility when school enrollment size or school poverty status were controlled; and, no significant differences in mobility rate, school size and poverty status for schools that met AYP when compared to schools that did not meet AYP” (p. 12).

School districts' accreditation status directly correlates to the results of state testing results. Rhodes (2005) conducted a study of 506 elementary and secondary schools from eight urban Ohio school districts to determine if a correlation existed between school-rankings (based on Annual Yearly Progress), state test results, and student mobility. "The primary conclusion drawn from this study is that mobility is a significant factor in predicting school success under the ODE/NCLB accountability system" (p. 67). McEachin (2005) studied the effects of mobility rates on overall school performance in Miami-Dade County Public School. Of the 124 Title I elementary schools studied, "those with high student mobility rates had significantly lower accountability scores than schools with lower student mobility rates" (pg. vii).

Social Adjustments

Adjusting socially to a new school may be difficult for mobile students according to the report, *K-12 Education: Many Challenges Arise in Educating Student Who Change Schools Frequently*, compiled by the United States Accountability Office (2010), "While some students adjust well to their new school, some do not...some mobile students feel like they do not belong, fail to make new friends, exhibit poor attendance and in some cases, drop out" (p. 18).

Rhodes (2008) included interviewing eight high school students from a large urban high school in the Midwest. Students shared reasons for leaving previous schools and impact of starting in a new school, "You have no idea what the other kids are going to be like, and you have to get yourself together and get ready first...I guess as a kid it was mostly, I would say you had to get to know the people, more than it was to do the

work. So, getting to know the people distracted you more than anything else at first. I mean, you don't know anybody. You know, you kind of feel alone out there if you don't know anybody, so that's kind of like your first thing you want to do" (p. 119).

A small amount of research has revealed that student mobility can be generational. While Schafft (2006) interviewed parents of mobile students, she discovered that many parents had experienced being mobile students themselves, "I know what it is like being 13-years-old moving from one town to another and going into a school where you absolutely know nobody. You don't even know the school. And I didn't want my kids going through that. I didn't" (p. 227).

Higher Dropout Rates

Multiple studies have revealed that mobile students show an increase in high school dropouts. Rumberger (2002) reports, "There is strong evidence that mobility during elementary school as well as during high school diminishes the prospects for graduation" (p. 1). Further confirmation of these findings was shared at a workshop sponsored by the National Research Council entitled *Student Mobility: Exploring the Impacts of Frequent Moves on Achievement*. Examining 9 methodologically strong studies of students who moved throughout their school years, Reynolds (Reynolds, Chen, and Herbers, 2009b) found, "a significant relationship between mobility and both lower school achievement and dropping out...in some cases the increase in dropout rate associated with mobility was as large as 30 percent"(p. 11). According to the United States Government Accountability Office (2010), "students who changed schools two or more times from 8th to 12th grade were twice as likely to drop out of high school, or not

obtain a General Equivalency Diploma, compared to students who did not change school” (p.16).

Impact on Teachers and Staff

Schools with high rates of student mobility impact teachers negatively. Rhodes (2005) found the following:

Teachers interviewed by these researchers were convinced that their impact on mobile children was completely inadequate. They expressed frustration over their own inability to figure out how to fill the gaps in children’s curricular knowledge and to manage new enrollees without disrupting planned and ongoing lessons. Even those with a positive attitude towards the mobile students did not feel that they knew how to help new children link information from their old school environments to their new, they felt like they were just ‘shooting in the dark’. There is no systemic support; if a teacher implements successful strategies for mobile students, but eventually leaves the school, that knowledge goes with the teacher, and her remaining colleagues are left to re-invent the wheel. (p. 24)

Additional staff is greatly impacted by the continual enrollment of new students. Processing students entering and exiting schools in a timely manner can become complicated. A study by Schafft (2006) revealed a huge mobility issue in Lamar, New York with a rate of sixty-eight percent of middle and high school students who had moved two or more times in the preceding four years, and students with four or more

moves were not uncommon. A report by the school guidance office reported, “Almost half of the mobile students needed support services, either through special education or other forms of remediation. The report concluded by noting: We are often dealing with students whose family circumstances are not ideal...under these circumstances the duties of record-keeping for various offices (guidance, attendance, nurse) have become increasingly burdensome and time-consuming” (p. 218).

Financial Impact on Districts

Financial impact on districts is a consequence of high rates of student mobility. Schafft (2006) conducted a study of nearly 300, mostly rural, school districts in New York. Administrators shared that within an area, the same districts shared the same mobile students moving between districts at greater cost to each district. One of the superintendents explains to Schafft (2006),

Most of the community does not recognize this as an issue. But it creates a huge problem. There is no general awareness, but there is no excess. The aid is frozen by the state. To pay for the needs of these kids we will have to go to the local taxpayer. It's a hard sell to the community at large that we have this unknown group that requires substantial resources that don't even exist to most people here, but nonetheless are very real to us (p. 215).

Administrators repeatedly described how their districts were negatively affected by the high costs associated with high-need, highly mobile students, as well as by the

unpredictability of their movement, complicating planning and budgeting processes (Schafft, 2006, p. 215)

Recommendations to Address Student Mobility

Missouri needs to recognize the importance of student mobility and how it impacts student achievement by creating policy that includes a fixed definition and consistent formula for measuring student mobility. Rumberger (2015), a leading researcher on this topic advises, “State officials should collect and report school and district mobility rates, as Colorado and Rhode Island do now. They should also use mobility rates as a measure of school effectiveness after suitable adjustments for student body characteristics. State officials should also allocate funds to schools with high mobility to establish programs to improve the integration of new students in a school” (p. 12).

Without a fixed definition and formula for calculating student mobility, comparisons cannot be studied between schools. With this data formulated and shared, DESE and education stakeholders can come together to address the negative impact of high student mobility rates on districts, staff and students.

Federal Education Policy on Student Mobility

The Federal Act that directly relates to mobility is the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Beatty (2010) shares this act “addresses the education of homeless children and youth in the U.S. public schools. This act was adopted in 1987 in response to data showing that up to 50 percent of homeless children were not enrolled in school” (p. 44).

Existing Policy Related to Student Mobility

The only policy in Missouri related to student mobility is enacting the Stewart B. McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Students who are defined as homeless typically change schools due to a hardship that results in losing a permanent home. In fact the support documents to this Act state, “Changing schools significantly impedes students’ academic and social progress. Many studies also have found highly mobile students to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers who do not change schools. Therefore, in determining the child’s best interest, the school district “shall to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child or youth in the school of origin, except when doing so is contrary to the wishes of the child’s or youth’s parent or guardian” (NAEHCY & NLCHP, 11/2009, p. 10). (School of origin is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed, or the school in which the student was last enrolled.) Districts must abide by this policy or suffer the possibility of losing federal funding.

Missouri does not have a policy defining student mobility nor requiring districts to systemically measure the number of mobile students in each school. Schools are mandated to complete a student population report every June, but no report is generated with student mobility rates. Without this policy to define and measure student mobility rates, DESE does not have a systemic method of obtaining data to study the adverse effect of mobility on student learning. Based on evidence from other research studies shared in this proposal, DESE needs to create a policy to educate all stakeholders of the adverse effects of changing schools throughout the school term. Districts need to create policy that exhausts all options to keeping a student in their initial school of enrollment.

When this is not an option for a student, the policy needs to define the systemic process that will minimize the harmful effects of student mobility. District policy should include reasonable expectations school personnel can implement when a new student arrives unexpectedly to ease the transition for all stakeholders.

Key Issues at the State Level

In order to determine if a school has a high student mobility rate, DESE needs to have a fixed definition of student mobility and calculation formula. Data needs to be gathered with a common formula used and available in a system with friendly access. Stakeholders seeking this data in Missouri should be able to visit DESE's website and find this data. But that is not the case. According to Melissa Bardwell, Supervisor, Office of Data System Management, DESE, (personal communication, January 25, 2016) "Mobility can be calculated different ways and we do not officially publish it in our MCDS (Missouri Comprehensive Data System) Portal...In order to get this data you would have to submit a data request."

DESE's website includes information about filling out the data request form with a note that data may be received within two-three weeks with the notation to contact DESE if the requested data is not received. Data requested through the summer may take longer as it is a busy season.

Upon completing the request form from DESE, sample data from area elementary schools confirmed a student mobility range from 22% to 52%. Data was received in seven weeks without information on how it was formulated.

This process seems antiquated. By 2016, state education departments must have efficient information systems which provide immediate data for analysis. Missouri must streamline this process by creating a policy with a fixed definition of student mobility, a fixed formula for calculating student mobility percentages and include an information tracking system with school districts using the same system vendor at the state and local levels. DESE will need to upgrade from its current information system to a system that is sophisticated enough to provide easy access to needed data on student mobility. Leading states which provide easy access to student mobility data are Colorado and Massachusetts.

Colorado's K-12 Education Data Systems

Colorado Department of Education's (CDE) website provides easily accessible student mobility data on Colorado districts and schools since it started tracking mobility rates in 2006. Duncan Anderson, Senior Data Analyst/Statistician (personal communication, January 19, 2016) shared that because Colorado is a local control state, districts may choose their own data system, but his office merges the data into the state system.

All schools participate in providing student data which allows his department to generate three rates related to student mobility – Student Stability Rates, Student Mobility Rates, and Mobility Incident Rates. The main page (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/mobility-stabilitycurrent>) clearly shows how each of these rates is calculated:

Student Stability Rate =

Unduplicated count of grade K-12 students who remained in the school or district in Year X **DIVIDED BY** Total number of students that were part of the same membership base at any time during Year X.

Student Mobility Rate =

Unduplicated count of grade K-12 students who moved into or out of the school or district in Year X **DIVIDED BY** Total number of students that were part of the same membership base at any time during Year X.

Mobility Incidence Rate =

Duplicated count of grade K-12 students who moved into or out of the school or district in Year X **DIVIDED BY** Total number of students that were part of the same membership base at any time during Year X.

Stakeholders needing disaggregated data related to student mobility may also choose District Level Data by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, Instruction Program/Service Type, and Grade. School Level Data choices include Gender and Race/Ethnicity and Instruction Program/Service Type. Providing these specific reports with the calculating formulas clearly defined provides clear and relevant data to access easily.

Massachusetts's K-12 Education Data Systems

Massachusetts Department of Education's website provides another example of a data information system that offers immediate access to student mobility rates. The Student Information Management System (SIMS) provides a student level collection system that allows the Department to collect and analyze more accurate and comprehensive information, to meet federal and state requirements, and to inform policy and programmatic decisions (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/data/>). The School Interoperability Frameworks (SIF) is a secure portal for data to be shared.

Information services statistical reports can be chosen from the main page and stakeholders may choose the Mobility Rates tab to view immediate data related to this topic. Student mobility data is available from 2007. These annual reports on student mobility are defined as, "the movement of students in and out of districts or public schools in the state" (<http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/mobility/>).

Districts provide student data to the MDE to produce the following rates – Intake (Transfer-In) Rate, Churn Rate, and Stability Rate. Annual reports clearly define and provide statistics for each rate:

Intake (Transfer-In) Rate =

Number of incoming students after the start of the school year
DIVIDED BY All students enrolled at any point in time during the school year

Churn Rate =

Number of incoming or outgoing students after the start of the school year
DIVIDED BY All students enrolled at any point in time during the school year

Stability Rate =

Number of students who remain at the educational setting for the entire year
DIVIDED BY Total number of students enrolled as of October 1 SIMS

Why are these rates important? By tracking students at the state level, stakeholders can better understand the advantages and/or disadvantages of children changing schools at different intervals throughout the year. Trends from these reports may provide useful information on the impact to districts, individual schools, and students so that adjustments may be made in a timely manner to better serve all stakeholders. DESE has the data as each student is provided an identification number (MOSIS Number) and enrollment status is kept current by schools. DESE does not have a policy on student mobility with a fixed definition of student mobility or fixed calculation formula. A policy with this information would provide a better understanding of the rates of student mobility in Missouri and the impact on districts, schools, and students.

Recommendation for Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Missouri's General Assembly needs to pass a statutory requirement for counting/tracking student mobility with a fixed definition and formula, provide funding to purchase an adequate student information system, and hire statisticians. Efforts were made to do this when a bill was proposed by Missouri Senator Maria Chappelle-Nadal which clearly defined student transiency including a specific formula to measure the mobility rate. The bill was passed by the House and Senate, but failed to be signed by the Governor when additional items were attached to the original proposal. Stakeholders in Missouri should not have to fill out a form to request data reports about student mobility rates and wait weeks for data. States such as Colorado and Massachusetts have demonstrated the importance of being able to retrieve student mobility data directly from the website.

Key Issues at the School District Level

Superintendents throughout the state of Missouri should be requesting annual reports on student mobility and student stability rates. Superintendents must focus on schools with higher rates of mobility to determine if they also have evidence of lower test scores, increase in behavior detentions and suspensions as well as increased dropout rates. Superintendents need to understand how high rates of student mobility affect curriculum and course planning decisions. As the District Leader, Superintendents need to be sensitive to the extra workload that comes with new students for clerical staff as well as classroom teachers. Teacher and staff retention should be studied to determine if there is a link between high turnovers in the schools with high mobility rates. Analyzing

the evidence of academic learning for non-mobile students who have consistently attended schools is as important as the student who just arrived. Academic data needs to be analyzed to have conversations about the impact on these students too. One of the greatest concerns for Superintendents is the financial burden placed on the District when students start after the yearly student enrollment number is submitted to DESE. Student count determines state aid and has a direct impact on adequate funding to educate students.

Recommendations to School District Stakeholders

With the student mobility numbers in hand and understanding the negative impact of changing schools after the school year begins, Superintendents and board members have a greater chance to address the problems and come up with better solutions to drive success for all students and staff.

Currently, in Missouri, districts submit a student population report each June. The following codes are used to generate a current enrollment status on each student in the district:

S000	StopOut: Exit is used when a student initially recorded as a dropout returns to school prior to the fall count date (last Wednesday in September) of the subsequent school year.
S001	StopOut Suspension: Exit is used when a student is placed on long term suspension and the student will not return to school until after the subsequent fall count date (last Wednesday in September).
T001	Transfer to another public school district in state
T002	Transfer to another public school within the district during the school year. From middle school to junior high school.
T003	Transfer to Home Schooled in state
T004	Transfer to Private School in state
T005	Transfer to Public School out of state
T006	Transfer to Private School out of state.
T007	Transfer to Home Schooled out of state.
T008	Transfer to another country (assumed continuing)
T009	Deceased (Transferred Out)
G01	Graduated
D02	Dropped Out: Expulsion
D03	Dropped Out: Received Cert - Students with disabilities who exited an educational program through the receipt of a certificate of attendance.
D04	Dropped Out: Reached Max Age - Students with disabilities who exited an educational program because they reached the maximum age for receipt of educational services and did not receive a diploma or certificate of attendance.
D05	Dropped Out: GED Program
D06	Dropped Out: Moved not known continuing
D01	Dropped Out: Other
R001	Remained in same school and advanced grade or advanced grade and moved onto the next school following natural progression, e.g., moving from middle school to junior high school.
R002	Remained in same school and was retained in the grade level.
R003	Student has remained in the building but has changed one or more of the following statuses. Residency Status, Full-Time/Part-Time Status.
R004	Student remains in the same district and building, but changed grade.

Table 1. Enrollment Codes

Codes in Table 1 provide data necessary for districts to generate a local student mobility rate report for analysis. Once DESE provides a fixed definition and calculating formula, these codes can be used to create a report with student mobility rates for deeper data analysis. The next step would be to share the data with stakeholders to create awareness of the issue and negative effects of student mobility.

Creating District Policy

Using this information, stakeholders should work together and create a district policy that addresses realistic and reasonable supports for students and staff in schools with high rates of mobile students.

Policy should include a systemic process of obtaining as much information about each neighboring district as possible. Building relationships with neighboring school districts is a critical step in supporting mobile students. Superintendents should work together as a region in making textbook selections in core subjects such as Communication Arts and Mathematics. Students who enter a new school, but are familiar with the current reading series, have a greater chance of continuing their learning with less interruption than a student having to learn a new textbook along with all of the other new things happening. Counselors in regional districts need to network and share course offerings at the high school level to support students in schools with higher mobility rates to better insure same courses or similar courses are offered.

When creating district policy to address new students, stakeholders need to discuss and formulate a step by step process of what is needed to support the success of

each child. This may vary depending on grade level of student as well as individual schools.

Recognizing that schools in lower economic populated communities tend to have higher mobility rates, Superintendents need to look at how the school district can address basic needs of families and offer wrap around services. To keep children in the classroom, Superintendents must be active in the community to bring in non-profit organizations who can provide clothing, food and grocery supplies, counseling and medical services. When families' basic needs are supported, the children have a better chance of staying in the same school.

Key Issues at the School Level

As soon as a student enters a school after the regular school year starts, many people are impacted. From the school's perspective, clerical staff enrolls the student and follow up with the previous school to obtain records and transcripts. If any information is given that the child received special services, a counselor must get involved and obtain Individualized Education Plans to legally continue providing the quality services the child needs. If the student is a bus rider, the transportation department must be notified. Student's health and nutrition needs must be shared with the school nurse and cafeteria staff. Counselors must work with the student to determine course schedule, and at the high school level, helping the student stay on course for graduation.

Notice is given to the new student's teacher or teachers of his enrollment. Teachers must stop their regular routine for that day and prepare appropriate textbooks and materials as most students who walk in the door in schools with high mobility rates

come with no supplies. Classroom teachers typically want to greet the child recognizing the social impact of trying to fit in as soon as possible. Classroom routines, rules, schedules, textbooks and expectations can be overwhelming for a new student. Along with the teacher being impacted, the rest of the students in the class typically share in excitement of a new student or not. Sometimes classmates are not welcoming which can cause additional stress on the classroom teacher and new student.

Teacher morale in schools with high mobility rates suffers, as it is very difficult to support, socially and academically, ongoing new students arriving. Teachers must continually adjust curriculum and lessons in order to determine where the new students' skill levels are and how to best support them. Students arriving in the middle of content lessons that progressively build suffer learning loss. While the teacher tries to offer individual catch up lessons, the rest of the class is pulled back to average skill level lessons. At no fault of the classroom teacher, the entire process is frustrating. Schools with high mobility rates tend to lose quality teachers to burn out.

Students entering schools after the beginning of the school year struggle with trying to fit in. Friendships have already been determined and social groups formed. Before a student can focus on academics, he or she has to deal with the social aspect of starting at a new school. Sometimes this stress is too difficult and leads to depression. The student starts skipping school and eventually drops out. In fact, mobile students are less likely to graduate high school on time or complete fewer years. Schools with high mobility rates typically have a higher dropout rate. Unfortunately, these students are also more likely to be arrested as adults.

High school students entering at irregular start dates, struggle with course schedules matching up with credits earned from previous schools. Courses may not match up or even be offered. Students may have missed the prerequisite skills already taught resulting in confusion and frustration leading to poor grades and credit loss.

Recommendations at the School Level

In order for all students to be successful, school staff needs to understand if the school has a high mobility rate. If so, all staff needs to recognize and discuss the impact on everyone.

Creating School Policy

Collectively, policy needs to be developed and followed with processes and supports to address the negative impact and strain on everyone. School policy addressing student mobility should be practical and not cumbersome to everyone impacted.

School staff needs to actively engage in educational opportunities in the region to build relationships with neighboring districts. Information developed from these relationships that would support issues related to student mobility need to be shared and implemented if found worthy.

Communication among stakeholders to share as much information on a new student as possible may be systemized through a student information system. Data should be entered as soon as possible and accessible to all stakeholders. Data that should be entered in the system would include previous school of attendance, grades or credits,

textbooks or curriculum previously used, medical and dietary issues, and any other content that the collective group determines is important.

School's parent-teacher organization members, retired community members, or non-profit volunteers could provide a greeting person when a new student arrives. This person acts as a school liaison to make sure the student has materials and supplies, shares information about schedules or courses, gives a tour of the facilities and introduces the student to fellow student liaisons. With preplanned welcome packets and flexible greeters, new students would feel welcomed and have an opportunity to talk with an individual without being rushed into the new environment.

Another relationship building activity of the liaison would be to have the new student fill out a student interest inventory and share that information with the homeroom teacher. The inventory could guide the liaison in introductions to school staff and information sharing about clubs or activities based on the student's responses.

Transition teams should be formed to focus on new students and how well they are adjusting socially and academically. Tutoring programs should be available to address academic learning gaps. Mobile students should be encouraged to join fun clubs and afterschool programs to build relationships with other students and staff.

Summary

Missing in Missouri is state policy defining student mobility or how to measure it consistently across all districts. Administrators, school personnel and students, with "a revolving door" of students entering and exiting their districts, need this fixed definition and formula to have conversations about the impact of student mobility on the district,

schools, and all students. Currently, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) lacks in sharing data related to student mobility rates. The last published data was available in 2007-2008 for grades 9-12 only. School districts in Missouri, experiencing high rates of student mobility, recognize it as a topic that needs to be addressed due to the disproportionality of schools with high student mobility rates.

Research validates the negative academic and social impacts on students who start school after the normal term begins, especially when it is not by choice. Reasons for changing schools may be due to schools closing or realignment of boundaries, family hardships, such as bankruptcy, incarceration, divorce, or job loss to students being moved to an alternative setting.

Districts receiving large numbers of new students after the state cutoff day for student count, suffer financially by shouldering the responsibility of educating each child without state aid to pay for additional staff, curriculum and materials. School staff struggle with keeping up with obtaining necessary transcripts and records from previous schools. Teachers work diligently to quickly accommodate new students with materials and supplies as well as determining skill level. While adjusting lessons and providing additional support to new students academically, classroom teachers also feel the need to help students fit in socially. Unfortunately, these negative factors impact progressive movement of curriculum and lessons for the non-mobile students. Staff morale suffers as well.

Policy needs to be created from the state level to the school level to address key issues related to student mobility. DESE must have a sufficient student information

system and statisticians to generate regular reports on student mobility rates in districts and schools. Analysis to determine correlation of districts with high student mobility rates to negative impact on districts and schools must happen so that practical policy may be created to offer support to all impacted.

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