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To: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
From: EducationCounsel
Subject: Research Scan on the Impact of Student Mobility on Student and School Outcomes
Date: July 20, 2016

To help inform the discussions and deliberations of the Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force, this memorandum follows up on our June memorandum that examined existing research on the impact of student mobility on student outcomes and on broader district/school performance. Drawing again on available published research, it provides additional detail on existing policies and practices related to:

- Culture Acclimation for Highly Mobile Dependants of Active Duty Military Personnel
- Charter Schools with Neighborhood Boundaries in Chicago and Philadelphia
- Student Transfer Windows in New Orleans

Please note that this review was not comprehensive and does not include all research that could be relevant to the Task Force's discussions. We aimed instead to provide a sampling of leading studies on mobility to provide a baseline of information. We may do additional research based on specific needs of the Task Force, if requested.

Based on this review, we see several interesting findings for the Task Force to consider:

- **With high mobility rates but strong student achievement outcomes, DoDEA schools have developed some strategies that researchers concluded could be replicable in other K-12 schools.** For example, one study found that, within 48 hours of arrival at a new DoDEA school, new student transfers complete a diagnostic which assesses reading and math skills, participate in a standardized interview with a school counselor to further assess academic standing, and participate in an orientation for new students where they are assigned to a peer as part of a mentoring or "buddy" system. DoDEA schools also share a common curriculum which further eases the student transfer process between schools in the system.

- **Two school systems in urban areas – Chicago and Philadelphia –have started to experiment with charter schools and neighborhood boundaries.** Both policies are still new and evidence of their impact is nascent at best. The Chicago policy does not entitle students to attend the charter school in their neighborhood boundary, but serves more as a guide for charter administrators in the lottery/enrollment process. The Philadelphia policy is part of a broader school turnaround strategy.

- **New Orleans** has established new policies that limit student transfers after October 2 to a handful of special circumstances (medical, safety, and childcare hardships). Though the specific impact of these policies on mobility has yet to be fully assessed, the process has added clarity to the number of students citywide requesting to move schools at different times in the year – and given administrators greater control over the process.

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Culture Acclimation for Highly Mobile Dependants of Active Duty Military Personnel

The following studies and articles provide an overview of the culture acclimation and academic adjustment policies implemented by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) school system to mitigate the harmful effects of student mobility. The DoDEA system serves more than 74,000 children of active duty military and Department of Defense civilian families in 14 school districts spanning several foreign countries, U.S. states, and U.S. territories.

Notably, studies have reached different conclusions on whether DoDEA policies and practices are replicable in other K-12 settings. Two studies identified several potentially replicable practices – especially during the initial period after transfer – while two other studies focused more on the unique factors that help DoDEA schools succeed in ways that may not be as possible in other K-12 settings.

- Monica Christina Esqueda, Ron Avi Astor, and Kris M. Tunac De Pedro, A Call to Duty: Educational Policy and School Reform Addressing the Needs of Children from Military Families (2012)
    - This article examines the policies and supports that DoDEA schools may be uniquely able to provide to military children.
    - The authors found that the DoDEA system is able to standardize curriculum across schools, thereby minimizing the misalignment of academic content that highly mobile students can experience as they transfer from school to school within a civilian school district. DoDEA schools share identical graduation requirements and school enrollment guidelines.
    - DoDEA schools have also found it beneficial to offer social support to mobile students and their families through community engagement activities such as afterschool peer support groups.
    - The practices employed by these schools to ease the student transfer process are made possible by DoDEA policy and practice efforts to educate the educators about military culture and potential effects mobility can have on a student's academic performance success.
    - DoDEA also supported a push for The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (ICEOMC) which aims to remedy the misalignment of academic content military children experience as they travel from state to state and transfer into civilian schools with wide ranging standards. The ICEOMC eliminates some of the barriers mobile military students face relating to enrollment, course placement, and graduation requirements.
- Linda Jacobson, Hazel R. Atuel, and Diana Pineda, The Building Capacity Project: An Exemplar on Supporting Military-Connected Schools (2014)
    - The DoDEA aims to improve academic and socio-emotional outcomes for military children at traditional and DoDEA system schools by funding the University of Southern California School of Social Work to support a consortium of school districts as they explore policies and practice that impact highly mobile student groups.
    - The project highlights the importance of several DoDEA policies that military-connected schools should adopt to support students' smooth transition to a new school including: individual counseling, peer mentoring and support, immediate new student orientation, family-focused events or orientation, immediate transfer of student records from one

school to the next, and reciprocal graduation requirements for course substitutions, waivers, and testing.

- Claire E. Smrekar and Debra E. Owens, "It's a way of life for us": High Mobility and High Achievement in Department of Defense Schools (2003)
    - o The study found that students attending DoDEA schools tend to outperform their public school peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The authors identified several DoDEA student mobility policies that might affect that high performance and could be adopted by traditional public schools facing high rates of student mobility.
    - o According to the authors, the DoDEA system treats student mobility as "a way of life rather than an intractable problem" and trains school administrators and teachers to implement policies and practices that prepare schools and classrooms for students to transfer in or out at any time.
    - o The study found that DoDEA schools have implemented several policies that can mitigate the harmful effects of student mobility including: orienting students in advance on how to welcome new classmates, administering diagnostic programs to students within 48 hours of transfer to the new school, and assigning each new student to both a school counselor and to a staff member who manages transfer of records.
- Claire E. Smrekar and Debra E. Owens, High Performance of Minority Students in DoDEA Schools: Lessons for America's Public Schools (2001)
    - o This study found that minority students attending DoDEA schools achieve higher levels of academic performance than their non-DoDEA peers due to the policies, school culture, and governance structures the system has adopted.
    - o Minority students at DoDEA schools have outperformed their peers on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Terra Nova, a comprehensive test of basic skills administered to students nationally.
    - o The authors argue that DoDEA system success with minority student achievement rates can be attributed to policies such as small school sizes and centralized leadership to make system wide directional leadership (e.g., launching a system wide standardized curriculum) balanced with district level leadership for day-to-day decision making.
- Dale N. Titus, Strategies and Resources of Enhancing the Achievement of Mobile Students (2007)
    - o This author found that several DoDEA policies meant to support high achievement in the highly mobile military student subgroup should be adopted by other schools and districts serving mobile students.
    - o The DoDEA system employs welcoming and orientation strategies for new students and encourages its schools to build partnerships with community-based organizations and local government agencies to help fill the needs gaps highly mobile students often face.
    - o Within 48 hours of arrival at a new DoDEA school, new student transfers complete a diagnostic which assesses reading and math skills, participate in a standardized interview with a school counselor to further assess academic standing, and participate in an orientation for new students where they are assigned to a peer as part of a mentoring or "buddy" system. DoDEA schools also share a common curriculum which further eases the student transfer process between schools in the system.
    - o The author found that, despite a student population turnover rate of about 37%, mobile students within the DoDEA school system experience higher graduation rates than their civilian peers and score above average on the math and verbal sections of the SAT.

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Charter Schools with Neighborhood Boundaries

This section reviews policies in place in Chicago and Philadelphia on establishing neighborhood attendance boundaries for charter schools. Minimal research has taken place on the impact of establishing charter schools with neighborhood attendance boundaries, at least partly because these efforts are quite new. It is also worth noting that cities have taken different approaches: Philadelphia is transforming district schools with neighborhood attendance boundaries into charter schools with attendance boundaries, while Chicago allows some attendance boundary.

Chicago Charter School Attendance Zone Policies
- **Context:**
  - The Illinois Charter Schools Law authorizes the Chicago Board of Education to designate attendance boundaries for certain charter schools to relieve overcrowding or to better serve low-income and at-risk students.[1]
- **Geographic boundaries and transfer policies:**
  - Charter boundaries in Chicago only serve as a "guide for charter school administrators to use during the application/lottery process" – and, therefore, differ from K-12 boundaries that entitle students to attend their neighborhood schools. Applicants residing within a specific boundary are generally given preference over applicants residing outside of the boundary. Chicago Public Schools – Charter School Preference Boundaries (2014-2015) Map provides information on preference boundaries for selected charter schools in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district.
  - According to analysis by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, Illinois law:
    - Allows charter schools to give priority to pupils residing within the charter school's attendance boundary in Chicago, if the Chicago school board has designated a boundary.
    - Allows the Chicago school board to designate attendance boundaries for no more than one-third of the charter schools permitted in the city if it determines that attendance boundaries are needed to relieve overcrowding or to better serve low-income and at-risk students.
    - Allows a charter school located in a school district that contains all or part of a federal military base to set aside up to 33 percent of its current charter enrollment to students with parents assigned to the federal military base, with the remaining 67 percent subject to the general enrollment and lottery requirements. It also provides that if a student with a parent assigned to the federal military base withdraws from the charter school during the course of a school year for reasons other than grade promotion, those students with parents assigned to the federal military base shall have preference in filling the vacancy.
- **Parent engagement:**

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[1] Illinois Charter Schools Law: Section 27A-4(d) – "Enrollment in a charter school shall be open to any pupil who resides within the geographic boundaries of the area served by the local school board, provided that the board of education in a city having a population exceeding 500,000 may designate attendance boundaries for no more than one-third of the charter schools permitted in the city if the board of education determines that attendance boundaries are needed to relieve overcrowding or to better serve low-income and at-risk students. Students residing within an attendance boundary may be given priority for enrollment, but must not be required to attend the charter school."

- o For the 2014 and 2015 charter application review cycle, CPS created [Neighborhood Advisory Councils](#) that provided feedback from families and communities on charter applications to open schools in their area and made recommendations to the district and board of education. (In 2015, the Councils were led by independent facilitators in response to concerns that the district was overly influencing the process.) Proposals rejected by CPS may be appealed to the Illinois State Charter School Commission, which has authority to overrule local school boards' chartering decisions.

- **Impact:**
  - o We were not able to find information on the impact of establishing neighborhood boundaries for charter schools within Chicago.

Philadelphia Renaissance Schools

- **Context:**
  - o Established as part of the [Imagine 2014](#) Initiative (5-year strategic plan established in 2009 for the School District of Philadelphia (SDP)), Renaissance Schools were announced as a way the district would transform historically failing schools by embracing internal and external partners with proven track records of success transforming schools.[2]
  - o There are three forms of Renaissance Schools: Innovation, Contract, and Charter. Each of these models has unique features, but all forms of Renaissance Schools will be granted greater autonomy in exchange for increased accountability.

- **Geographic boundaries and transfer policies:**
  - o The Renaissance Schools Advisory Board's [final report](#) describes the effort as "an opportunity for school communities to rally around the transformation of their neighborhood schools." In other words, by preserving school boundaries, SDP hoped to create greater buy in and engagement from the broader community in the school turnaround process.
  - o As a [2010 SDP press release](#) states: "Renaissance Schools will continue to serve as neighborhood schools with a defined geographic boundary for assigning students. Student retention is a key performance indicator for the Renaissance Schools, and the District expects that successful Renaissance Schools will achieve higher rates of student retention as a result of engaging curriculum, high-quality enrichment programs for students, and skilled and caring teachers and school staff."[3]
  - o The SDP's [FAQ on Renaissance Charter School Initiative for Parents](#) explains that, during the transition from a traditional public to a Renaissance School, current students are

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[2] For more information on the SDP's purpose, definitions, and policies for these schools, see [Renaissance Schools Initiative Policy](#).

[3] More detail about the Renaissance Schools' governance structure: "independent Local Education Agency with a charter school board of trustees to oversee all elements of school curriculum and operations. The relationship between charter schools and the School District shall be accordance with the Pennsylvania Charter School Law and with the charter agreement between the School District and the charter school's board of directors. In order to adhere to the mission of the Renaissance Schools initiative and to maintain high levels of accountability, Renaissance charter agreements will include provisions outlining requirements for student enrollment, student achievement, data reporting, grade configuration, facilities, and inclusion of the Renaissance Schools charter school in the School Annual Report and other School District accountability systems. The provisions will include stringent academic requirements for turnaround school success that may exceed performance targets for non-Renaissance Schools charter schools. These provisions will also be used as a basis for a decision to renew, not renew or revoke a Renaissance Schools charter at the end of its term."

guaranteed enrollment in the new Renaissance Charter School. Students may also opt out and be reassigned to the next closest district-run school with available space and, if applicable, with the student's academic support program. [4]

- **Parent engagement:**
  - o The 2009 strategic plan establishes that each school recommended for transformation will have an evaluation committee (School Advisory Council) that is capped at 11 members, and must include five parents/guardians of current students. The role of the SAC/evaluation committee, as defined in the 2015 Parent FAQ, is to review and rate the charter partner proposals and evaluate how well each one would serve the needs of the school, taking into account the unique circumstances of the school and its students." Taking into account the School Advisory Council's reviews and ratings, the district superintendent makes the final recommendation to the School Reform Commission, the governing body of the SDP.
  - o Though the Renaissance Schools Initiative was announced in 2009, 2015 marks the first time ever for parents/guardians to serve on the official evaluation committee reviewing transformation proposals.

- **Impact:**
  - o The SDP's office of Research and Evaluation provides a collection of documents examining performance trends on "key academic and climate indicators" in Renaissance Schools.
  - o The December 2013 Renaissance Schools Initiative Progress Report found that Renaissance Initiative K-8 Charter Schools were "making statistically significant gains (or mitigating declines) over comparison schools in both reading and math during the first two years of the initiative. The report also notes that the Renaissance Initiative, at the time, was very new, and that though many of the schools were converted during a time of "major financial instability in the District, which was followed by leadership, staffing, and programmatic upheaval, "there was evidence of positive improvements at some Renaissance Initiative schools."

Student Transfer Windows

This section reviews intra- and inter-district transfer policies in place in New Orleans.

New Orleans Inter- and Intra-District Transfer Windows
- **Context:**
  - o After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, all but the highest performing public schools were moved to the control of the state-run Recovery School District (RSD). The high-performing schools remained under the control of the Orleans Paris School Board (OPSB), while the schools under the control of the RSD were transitioned into charter schools. In May 2016, the Louisiana Senate voted to begin transitioning schools currently under the RSD back to the control of the OPSB.

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[4] Broader school changes may include a longer school day and school year; improvements to the curriculum; improvements to school climate; new student enrichment programs during and after school; and staffing changes.

- o Louisiana has both mandatory intra-district and voluntary and mandatory inter-district transfer programs.[5] Some studies on student mobility have specifically looked at mobility in New Orleans.[6]
- o Both RSD and OPSB use a computerized enrollment system called OneApp. Serving 89 percent of New Orleans public schools, the system is administered by EnrollNOLA and allows families to rank their preferred schools and be matched to a school that has availability and best matches the students' preferences. EnrollNOLA also manages Mid-Year Enrollment and Late Enrollment.

- **Transfer polices:**
  - o New Orleans used to have a larger problem of students leaving schools after the first "count day" on October 1, which led to a new set of policies aimed at reducing midyear mobility rates and giving administrators greater clarity into and control over the process.
  - o The primary enrollment window spans from November to the end of February of the preceding school year for schools using OneApp.
  - o "Late Enrollment" spans from July to October 1 of a given school year. It is designed for families new to New Orleans, those who missed the application window, or those experiencing other circumstances that necessitate a placement change.
  - o On October 1, schools may decide to backfill.
    - If fewer than five schools are willing to do so for a given grade, than all schools are required to open a seat in that grade, initiating a "round robin"-style matching process.
    - Participating schools make two major commitments in planning for their arriving students: (1) to backfill during the application rounds, accounting for student attrition and allowing the maximum number of applicants to go to a preferred school, and (2) to serve all students as they arrive throughout the school year.
  - o Under the Superintendents' Policy on Admissions, Transfers, and Re-admissions (July 2013), students seeking to transfer schools after October 1 must qualify for a medical, safety, or childcare Hardship Transfer.
    - Medical Hardship can apply when a student has medical issues that can be addressed by a change in school. Supporting documentation signed by a doctor is required.
    - Safety Transfer can apply when a student's continued presence at a school may be unsafe for the student. The current school must provide supporting documentation.

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[5] The Education Commission of the States outlines Louisiana's policies as of November 2015.

[6] Spiro Maroulis, Robert Santillano, Douglas N. Harris and Huriya Jabbar, What Happened to Student Mobility After the New Orleans' Market-Based School Reforms (2016) (looked at student mobility rates and patterns before and after the school reforms post-Katrina and found that overall mobility rates declined after the school reform for elementary/middle schools and decreased slightly for high schools; mobility rates decreased post-school reform; and that the greater the performance score difference between schools, the greater the number of students leaving the lower-performing school to attend the higher-performing school); Richard O. Welsh, Matthew Duque, Ph.D., Andrew McEachin, Ph.D., School Choice, Student Mobility and School Quality: Evidence from post-Katrina New Orleans (2014) (found that high-performing students tend to move to high-performing schools, that low-performing students tend to move to low-performing schools, but that the majority of students remained in the schools they initially chose even when given freedom to choose.)

- - Childcare Hardships can apply when a family's childcare, transportation, or after-care situation has substantially changed since the beginning of the school year. The parent or guardian must provide supporting documentation. Homeless students are not required to demonstrate a travel hardship before transferring to a new school.
    - Principal-to-Principal Transfer is also available, which allows for transfer if the principal of the "sending" school, the principal of the "receiving" school, and the parent/guardian are all in agreement with the transfer.
  - Students seeking to transfer must go to a centralized enrollment center and apply for a particular transfer type. For a transfer to be granted, the transfer must ameliorate the hardship and must be the only solution to the hardship. Transfers are approved on a case-by-case basis, with stronger scrutiny applied closer to testing dates. One full-time employee reviews transfer applications. A manager oversees hardship transfers and the expulsion hearing office.
  - Expulsions are reviewed in a central hearing office. Three alternative programs accept expelled students – expelled students may not select from any school with an open seat.
  - New arrivals and transfers to New Orleans may select any school with an open seat on a first-come-first-serve basis.[7]
- **Impact:**
  - [EnrollNOLA Annual Report](#) (2016)analyzed enrollment data for the 2015-16 school year OneApp application process.
    - 92% of students who could return to their school for the following school year did not apply to transfer.
    - 77% of Hardship Transfer requests were received from October to January (ranging from 64 to 104 per month). (The report does not address how these numbers broke down by type of hardship transfer.)
    - Approximately 55% (~253 of 461) hardship requests were approved in the 2014-15 school year. (The report does not address how these numbers broke down by type of hardship transfer.)
    - New student arrivals remained steady over the course of the year, peaking around the new year.

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[7] The final five bullet points are based on an informational interview between DME staff and NOLA officials.