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: June 21, 2016

To help inform the discussions and deliberations of the Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force, this memorandum provides our review of existing research on the impact of student mobility on student outcomes (pp. 2-7) and on broader district/school performance (pp. 7-8). The Appendix includes a sampling of mobility rates from urban districts across the country (including notes about each state’s calculation methods). 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 potential takeaways for the Task Force:

- **Student mobility is a complex issue with a variety of causes and contributing factors**, including student mobility due to voluntary (e.g., moving homes) or involuntary factors (e.g., eviction).

- **Mobility is common.** A national study found that a majority of students in the U.S. make at least one nonpromotional school change during elementary school with a sizeable minority making at least two changes. And a study of elementary schools in Chicago Public Schools found that only 50 percent of students remain enrolled over a three-year period in the typical Chicago elementary school. (Both studies are detailed later in this memorandum.)

- **Mobility can have an independent impact on student achievement and on overall school/district performance,** even in the presence of other factors.

- **There is a particularly large body of evidence that examines the impact of mobility on student-level experiences and outcomes.** As a result, we know that mobility appears to affect some student populations differently than others, especially those that may have fewer supports.
  - Young children, students experiencing homelessness, students in the foster care system, and students whose parents are migrant workers have been shown to have experienced especially negative effects as mobility tended to exacerbate other challenges.
  - Studies also showed that certain grade spans – Pre-K and early elementary, grades 4 through 8, and grades 11 and 12 – may be especially challenging times for students to move, particularly if the move occurs during the school year.
  - At least one study found that negative educational outcomes are more likely for intra-district moves rather than moves between districts.
  - At the same time, another population of students with high mobility rates – students from military families – has regularly outperformed national averages on NAEP.

- **A smaller body of evidence also suggests that mobility can impact schools and districts as well.** Studies have concluded mobility can impact class pacing, school disciplinary issues, and parent engagement. As a result, this can lead to diminished overall student performance, reduced teacher and staff morale, and increased teacher dissatisfaction.

- **Research has shown that schools and districts can reduce the impact of mobility through well-designed engagement and intervention strategies.**
Impact of Student Mobility on Student Outcomes

This section reviews studies that found a connection between student mobility and student outcomes generally, followed by studies that examined the experiences of specific student populations (young children, students experiencing homelessness, students in the foster care system, students whose parents are serving in the military, and students whose parents are migrant workers). Studies are listed in alphabetical order by the lead author’s last name.

The following studies have found some connections between student mobility and student outcomes generally:

  - This study found that the negative relations between school mobility and academic achievement are particularly pronounced among students from large urban school districts making intradistrict moves.

  - This study found that, while mobile students are more likely than their peers to experience other developmental risk factors such as economic hardship, student mobility is a unique indicator of certain developmental outcomes such as depression symptoms, failure to graduate high school on-time, and adult arrests. While a high frequency of school moves throughout a student’s K-12 academic career is predictive of some detrimental young adult outcomes, school mobility between the fourth and eighth grades is especially predictive of negative outcomes.
  - The study recommends several interventions to lessen the occurrence of school mobility or at least mitigate its negative impact, including: district policies that promote flexible attendance areas, collaboration with other public service agencies to improve residential stability, and coherent organization structures like co-located or full-service schools.

  - Though it is difficult to separate student mobility and low academic achievement/engagement as causes of student dropout, this report utilizes a “propensity score” to compare mobile and non-mobile children with similar academic profiles to show that student moves do account for some risk of dropping out of school.

  - This policy brief reviewed two decades of research literature which found school mobility to have harmful effects on elementary school achievement, student test scores, and high school graduation, and also to affect most severely those students experiencing multiple moves for involuntary reasons such as financial necessity or family disruption. Research showed that mobile students are also likely to experience disruptions to their social development as they cycle through relationships with peers, teachers, and set routines. The brief also reviewed research that found that student mobility can be exacerbated by other factors such as low-income status and homelessness. Moreover, studies have shown that student mobility may also have an
impact on the non-mobile students attending a school by introducing a “chaos factor” and disruption to previously established classroom flow.

- Schools and districts can lessen the incidence of student mobility or mitigate its harmful effects with careful school closure policies, orientation activities and personnel support for transfer students, the inclusion of mobility rates in measurements of school effectiveness, and collaboration with other public service agencies to promote residential stability.

  - This study found that students who transfer schools three or more times during their academic careers may be more likely than their non-mobile peers to repeat a grade, be suspended or expelled from school, and experience emotional or behavioral problems.

  - The study found that children who have moved an average or above-average number of times are not significantly harmed if they reside in families in which both biological parents are present; however, for children in other family structures, any move is associated with an adverse school life.

  - This study found that – though the measures of “child dysfunction” (i.e., delayed growth and development, learning disorders, school failure, frequent behavioral problems) are correlated with characteristics like poverty, race, and family structure that are linked to high rates of transience – mobility had a measurable effect on each of the variables in question as well.

  - This study found that student mobility can lead to lower math and reading scores on end-of-grade assessments and that school transfers are more frequent among low-income and minority students. It also found that intradistrict school transfers have adverse effects on student outcomes while cross-district moves may have positive or no effects.

The following studies have examined how student mobility may uniquely impact younger children.
These studies may be especially important given that data that show that majority of students in the U.S. make at least one nonpromotional school change during elementary school with a sizeable minority making at least two changes.1

  - This summary of a workshop to explore the effects of student mobility highlights principle themes in research and found that school transfers during kindergarten may cause students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, to lag behind their peers in overall academic achievement and grade promotion throughout primary school. It also reviewed research that showed that school mobility between kindergarten and third grade may have greater consequences for English language

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1 Russell W. Rumberger, Student Mobility: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions 3 (2015)
learners, students receiving special education services, or children from low-income families.

  - This study found that student mobility has its own significant effect on student outcomes, even though it is also associated with other pre-existing risk factors (e.g., coming from a low-income family). It also found that school mobility between second and fifth grades can predict declines in students’ classroom participation and academic performance. The cumulative effects of multiple school transfers during elementary grades may have a greater effect on student outcomes than a single move.

  - This study of a cohort of New York City kindergartners until sixth grade found that early mobility (prior to third grade) was a more potent predictor of sixth-grade achievement than later mobility. After controlling for socioeconomic status and other demographic characteristics, it concluded that “associations of early mobility with achievement were not enormous, but were large enough to cause concern.”
  - The research also reviewed results from two longitudinal studies of European student populations which found that, after controlling for prior achievement, school mobility had no effect on student achievement.

  - This small-scale study found that frequent school changes in the primary grades were related to lower achievement levels in math and reading, even controlling for sex and the effects of achievement prior to the school moves.

The following studies have examined how student mobility may uniquely impact students experiencing homelessness.

  - This brief reviewed a large body of evidence around school mobility and found that school mobility, particularly moves within the academic year, is linked to negative education outcomes. The brief also found that frequent moves are "particularly damaging" and that homeless children are more likely to be high-frequency movers. Included in the brief are specific examples in several urban school districts in Washington state.

- John W. Fantuzzo et al., *The Unique and Combined Effects of Homelessness and School Mobility on the Educational Outcomes of Young Children* (2012)
  - This study about mobility and homeless students found that "homelessness had a unique association with problems in classroom engagement, school mobility was uniquely related to both academic achievement and problems in classroom engagement, and experiencing both homelessness and school mobility was the most detrimental for both forms of educational well-being."

The following studies have examined how student mobility may uniquely impact students in the foster care system. Please note, however, that these findings are limited due to limitations in existing data and research. The role of school moves in poor school outcomes for foster children is not at
present firmly established empirically; most studies of school transitions in children in foster care have been based either on small samples with retrospective, self-report data or have relied on district-level records, which may only follow children’s transitions as they travel within a district, leading to underestimation of moves.

- Barton Allen and James S. Vacca, *Frequent Moving has a Negative Affect on the School Achievement of Foster Children Makes the Case for Reform* (2010)
  - This literature review include studies that found that children in foster care are faced with several challenges, including instruction that is often interrupted by frequent moves to different communities and schools, living in different foster homes with new families where academic are not a priority, a lack of parent support with the school, and a few opportunities to have consistent peer groups for interaction and socialization. Foster children, moreover, generally lack positive relationships with school administrators, support staff, teachers and classmates
  - When it comes to reading and other areas of academic achievement, the study found, that success of students in foster care is “generally affected by their frequent school and home mobility and a breakdown in communication and coordination among key people and agencies responsible for their education.” Moreover, these students frequently do not have a consistent and knowledgeable advocate who can act on their behalf for special education and remedial reading services. The foster parents who are typically the most familiar with the needs of the children are unprepared to negotiate services (e.g., Special Education and Section 504 systems). Finally, frequent placement changes disrupt the authority of foster parents to represent children’s educational interests.

- Dylan Conger and Marni J. Finkelstein, *Foster Care and Student Mobility* (2003)
  - This study found that foster children may be more likely to transfer schools and experience longer delays during these transfers than their non-foster peers, but notes that "there is limited research in this area, in part because many child welfare systems do not systematically monitor the school outcomes of children in care. Delays associated with school movements for foster children, in part due to the heavy paperwork involved and lack of coordination between school and child welfare personnel."
  - For ideas on how to address these challenges, the study observes, "Research on interagency collaboration suggests that many child-serving agencies fail to ensure consistent and coordinated services to shared populations. The communication failures in the case of foster children often begin with notification of their status. Some caseworkers and foster care providers do not inform school staff of a child’s custodial status, due to concerns about children being stigmatized by the foster care label or treated differently by their teachers and other school personnel."

  - This study examined the early school moves of a group of kindergarten children in foster care and compared their school moves to those of children from the same age and socioeconomic status groups. The authors found that children in foster care made more school transitions, were 6 times more likely to make multiple moves, and were 4 times more likely to move during the school year.
  - The authors also found significant total indirect effects for a mediated path from foster care placement to socioemotional competence. Children in the foster care group were positively associated with behavioral problems in kindergarten, and were negatively
associated with early learning skills and academic and socioemotional competence in grades 3-5.

The following studies have examined how student mobility may uniquely impact the children whose parents are serving in the military. Notably, some research has found that these students can outperform their national peer groups on national assessments (e.g., NAEP), while other studies have noted some of the unique challenges that these students face.

  o This study showed that students in military families can feel others view them (particularly non-military students) as different and are hesitant to extend friendships. Military students who attended schools on base tended to experience fewer stressors than students that attended schools in areas with a lower military student population.
  o Students have issues learning new school policies, procedures, and logistics, and miss opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. They face difficulty transferring schools because of inconsistent policies regarding school credit requirements and paperwork. Finally, they can miss critical lessons or skills due to move, and special student populations (e.g., special education, gifted) can face even longer procedural and academic process constraints.

  o In this literature review, the authors compiled a number of finding on the impact of multiple school transitions on military children. It reviewed studies that found that children whose parents are serving in the military are more mobile than their civilian peers, relocating every 1-4 years. These children also experience interstate relocation challenges, such as varying academic standards and graduation requirements.
  o Military adolescents experience common mobility challenges, such as slow transfer of school records and differences in curricula between schools, adapting to new school environments and making friends, limited access to extracurricular activities, but also unique challenges, such as a lack of understanding of military culture by public school teachers and staff and tension at home and parental deployment. As the authors observed, "School-age military children are especially vulnerable to the stress related to frequent transitions, as they must simultaneously cope with normal developmental stressors such as establishing peer relationships, conflict in parent/child relationships and increased academic demands."

  o This study found that children whose parents are serving in the military can show adaptability and flexibility to new situations and have learned coping mechanisms with each move or transition.

- Claire Smrekar and Debra Owens, "It's a Way of Life for Us": *High Mobility and High Achievement in Department of Defense Schools* (2003)
  o This study found that students in the United States Department of Defense schools scored higher, when compared to the United States average, on the 8th grade writing and reading portions of the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The trend of students continued on the 2007 Writing portion of the NAEP and the 2009 reading portion of the NAEP.
Finally, the following study examined how student mobility may uniquely impact the children of migrant workers.

  - Given the transient nature of migrant farm work, the author identifies several educational risk factors for children of migrant workers in labeling this population the “most disadvantaged student population in America” and the “most undereducated major subgroup in the United States.” These include: (1) frequent and numerous move; (2) high risk of dropout; (3) low social status in receiving communities contributes to marginalization; (4) misidentification of special education services due to language barriers; and (5) racism and xenophobia.

**Impact of Student Mobility on School and/or District Performance**

As noted in the introduction to this memo, the majority of the existing body of literature on student mobility pertains to the impacts of frequent moves on a student’s academic performance. However, what nascent research examining school and district impact exists indicates that the effects of student mobility are not limited to those students who are experiencing upheaval. From what was gathered, it seems that the effects of student mobility on schools and districts are realized via diminished overall student performance, reduced staff morale, and teacher dissatisfaction.

- Scott R. Buchanan, *The Relationship Between Mobility and Student Achievement* (2015)
  - This broader report notes that, because mobile students may transfer into a school with knowledge gaps, they can affect the pacing of the classroom curriculum.

- Nehati Engec, *Relationship Between Mobility and Student Performance and Behavior* (2006)
  - Researchers found that mobile students were at higher risk of poor academic performance and discipline problems that result in suspensions.

  - This study of student mobility across Texas found that student turnover, especially during the school year, adversely affected student achievement not just of mobile students, but everyone in the school "as increased time is spent bringing all students to the same point in the curriculum, developing normal procedures, integrating parents into school programs, and so forth." The study also found that the effects were larger for poor and minority students.

  - Research cited in this review indicated that students who experience greater levels of mobility tend to have lower academic outcomes, as well as negative behavioral and developmental traits. This negative impact is especially pronounced for children who experience moves in early grades, whose long-term reading and math skills are depressed as a result.
  - With regard to the school as a whole, high rates of mobility in individual students also bring down average school performance, as well as that of the students who are not mobile. In fact, researchers found a correlation between rates of student turnover and accountability rating. Looking at the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), this paper finds that schools with higher rates of student mobility were also rated more poorly than those with low turnover.
• David Kerbow, *Patterns of Student Mobility and Local School Reform* (1996)
  o This report notes that classrooms are affected by the introduction of mobile students. Examples of their impact include: disruption of classroom instructional routines, use of discrete teaching modules (rather than “integrative instructional approaches”), and disparate levels of knowledge between children who enter at different points in time. The report also notes that there are certain administrative costs associated with incorporating mobile students into their new classrooms. On a broader level, the author notes that waves of student mobility have the potential to undo some of the gains made by schools that have made progress through reforms.

• David Kerbow, Carlos Azcoitia, and Barbara Buell, *Student Mobility and Local School Improvement in Chicago* (2003)
  o This study found that only 50 percent of students remain enrolled over a three-year period in the typical Chicago elementary school. It also found that, though student residential changes account for the majority of cases, more than two fifths are school-related. Moreover, many students were found to move within a small network of schools that share similar geography, racial/ethnic composition, and poverty.
  o To address this issue, Chicago aimed to increase awareness of the impact of mobility through parent brochures (focusing on their rights and responsibilities) and complementary materials for teachers and administrators. Also, though it had broader aims, a Comprehensive Community Schools initiative aimed to reduce the impact of mobility by opening school buildings beyond the school day and extending resources to families (e.g., medical care and other social services).

• Virginia L. Rhodes, *Kids on the Move: The Effects of Student Mobility on NCLB School Accountability Ratings* (2005)
  o This literature review mines existing sources of information on student mobility to identify the following deleterious effects of transience on schools: (1) Non-mobile students experience negative impacts from mobile peers due to reallocation of time, attention, resources to newcomers. (2) Teacher morale suffers due to the extra work of bringing new students into the classroom community and up to speed, both socially and academically. (3) School staff morale also declines as teachers feel dissatisfied and view their jobs as undesirable; this, in turn leads to schools with a great deal of student mobility to be staffed by inexperienced educators. (4) There can be a lack of continuity in student recordkeeping and sharing. (5) Required testing windows can be affected by limited test administration time.

• Russell W. Rumberger, *Student Mobility: Causes, Consequences, and Solutions* (2015)
  o This literature review includes information on the “demoralization, stress, and tension” felt by teachers in schools with high mobility when faced with a great deal of churn. Like others, this study also notes that the peers of mobile students also experience negative academic effects.

  o This study – a rare look at the impact of student mobility on teachers – uses interviews of educators near Philadelphia to identify three main areas of concern from teachers regarding their students, pertaining broadly to: (1) behavior and attitude; (2) academic foundations; and (3) issues of time related to teaching mobile populations.

Focused on five young adult males, researchers conducted interviews to examine the causes of alienation that led to their lack of high school diploma. From these meetings, three central themes arose that may also relate to engaging students (especially those with mobility-related challenges) in general more effectively: (1) the necessity of relationship building; (2) loss of trust between students and school-based adults; and (3) fear of failure/disappointing self and family.

**Appendix: Student Mobility Rates in Urban Districts**

The following information uses public information from state education agencies about mobility rates in a variety of urban districts across the country.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>How the State Calculates Mobility</th>
<th>Urban School System</th>
<th>Its Mobility Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Student Mobility Rate = [Unduplicated count of K-12 students who moved into, out of school or district in SY X] ÷ [total # students that were part of same membership base at any time during SY X]</td>
<td>Denver Public Schools</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
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<td>Note: In the 2012-2013 school year the mobility calculation was modified. In the past, students who transfer to a school within the same district over the summer were not counted as mobile students. This rule was expanded in the 2012-2013 year so that students who transfer over the summer (notice this is summer transfers only) to different districts also are not counted as mobile students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Mobility index: the frequency of students entering and leaving a school throughout the year.</td>
<td>Miami-Dade County Public Schools</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Note: The index is not calculated as a percentage.</td>
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### How the State Calculates Mobility

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Urban School System</th>
<th>Its Mobility Rate</th>
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| **Georgia** | “To count as “mobile” for the purposes of this analysis, students must have entered or withdrawn from a school between October 2 and May 1. October 2 is the Georgia Department of Education’s (GaDOE) fall enrollment count date. May 1 is used as a consistent date that is prior to the end of the school year in all Georgia districts. Students who withdrew and reentered the same school within seven days are not counted as mobile.

To assess mobility at the school and district level, the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) calculated a churn rate for each school and district, which represents the number of student entries and exits during the school year divided by the number of students in the school on October 2. In 2012-13, the average school churn rate was 23.0%, but the median rate was 16.9%. The rates ranged from 1.1% (Newton County Theme School at Ficquett) to 756.3% (DeKalb Alternative School). At the district level, the average churn rate was 17.5%, and the median rate was 14.8.” |
|          | Atlanta Public Schools | 29.8% |
| **Illinois** | Mobility rate is based on the number of times students enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Student mobility (turnover): any enrollment change between the first school day in October and the last day of the school year. It is calculated as sum of the students who transferred out and the students who transferred in, divided by the average daily enrollment, multiplied by 100. Students are counted each time they transfer out or in during the reporting year. (Individual students may be counted more than once.)

- Transfers out: all incidents of students being removed from the enrollment roster for any reason.
- Transfers in: all incidents of students being added to the enrollment roster. |
|          | Chicago Public Schools (Source #1, Source #2) | 17.5%  
|          | | 17% |
| **Indiana** | n/a | Indianapolis Public Schools  
|          | | Intradist. = 8.2%  
|          | | Interdist. = 18.4% |
How the State Calculates Mobility | Urban School System | Its Mobility Rate
---|---|---
Maryland

The student mobility percentage is calculated by dividing the sum of entrants and withdrawals by the average daily membership.  
- **Entrants**: # and % of students entering (transferring in or re-entering) school during the September to June school year after the first day of school. A student moving from one school to another within the same school district as a result of promotion is not considered to be an entrant for mobility purposes unless the student entered school after the first day.  
- **Withdrawals**: # and % of students withdrawing (transfers and terminations) for any reason during the September to June school year after the first day.

Data are reported at elementary (K - 5), middle (6 - 8), high (9 - 12) school levels.


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban School System</th>
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<tr>
<td>Baltimore City Public Schools</td>
<td>Elem.: 31.3% Middle: 27.9% High: 32.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery County Public Schools</td>
<td>Elem.: 13.6% Middle: 10.2% High: 11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince George’s County Public Schools</td>
<td>ES: 23.5% MS: 19.2% HS: 22.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Massachusetts

Mobility: students transferring into or out of public schools, districts or the state. There are three different measures to capture mobility: Intake (Transfer-in) Rate; Churn Rate; and Stability Rate.  
- **Intake Rate**: # of students that enroll in the state, a district, or school after the beginning of the school year  
- **Churn Rate**: # students transferring into or out of a public school or district throughout the course of a school year  
- **Stability Rate**: # students remaining in a district or school throughout the school year.

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<th>Urban School System</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boston Public Schools</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
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Nevada

Transiency rate: % students who do not finish the school year at the same school they started.

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<tr>
<th>Urban School System</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clark County Public Schools (Las Vegas area)</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
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3 For further details on Massachusetts: [http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/mobility/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/mobility/)
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<th>State/Urban School System</th>
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<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Student mobility rate is a measure of how many students are transferring in and out of a school during a given school year.</td>
<td>Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>Mobility rate formula: ( \frac{\text{[All children who enrolled after September 30] + [All children who withdrew before June 1]}}{\text{[Total enrollment for school district]}} )</td>
<td>Providence Public School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Mobility (Campus Profile only) formula: ( \frac{# \text{ mobile students in SY}}{# \text{ students who were in membership at any time during SY}} ) * A student is considered to be mobile if he or she has been in membership at the school for less than 83% of the school year (i.e., has missed six or more weeks at a particular school).</td>
<td>Dallas Independent School District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>This rate is calculated at the campus level. The mobility rate shown in the Profile section of campus reports under the “district” column is based on the count of mobile students identified at the campus level. That is, the district mobility rate reflects school-to-school mobility, within the same district or from outside the district. For 2011-12, district-level mobility has been added to the AEIS data download of district data. See also Campus Group. (Source: PEIMS, June 2011)</td>
<td>Houston Independent School District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Student mobility is a measure of change in student membership from the first official membership count (September 8, 2014) through the last day of the school year. The mobility rate is expressed as the percent of a school's enrollment entering or reentering after September 8, 2014, or leaving school prior to the last day of the school year.</td>
<td>Fairfax County Public Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Student mobility: This is a measure of how many students move in and out of the school. It is calculated by dividing the number of student entrances and exits at a school (excluding graduates) after the October 1 headcount by the October 1 student headcount. For K-8 schools, a single figure is reported for elementary and middle schools</td>
<td>Seattle Public Schools</td>
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