May 5, 2015

Honorable Mayor Bates and Members of the City Council
City of Berkeley
2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

SUBJECT: Inclusion of Berkeley Rent Board Members in the 2x2 Joint Task Force

Dear Mayor Bates and City Council Members,

The Rent Stabilization Board requests that the Berkeley City Council and Berkeley Unified School District invite the Rent Board to appoint two of its members to the existing 2x2 Joint Task Force.

At our January 2015 Board meeting, the Rent Board unanimously voted to request that the current 2x2 include two Rent Board commissioners to create a 2x2x2.

Lack of housing stability – epitomized in Berkeley by spiraling rents and substandard rental housing stock – has been shown to be a leading "non-school factor" in achievement gaps across the country.

For brevity's sake, we submit that this scientific evidence is an excellent reason to involve the Rent Board – whose purview is overseeing landlord/tenant law and ensuring safe, stable housing for all Berkeley residents – in a 2x2x2 Joint Task Force.

Yours,

Jesse Townley, Chair
Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board

For more information, please see:

2. "School Stability and School Performance: A Review of the Literature", Dr. Beth Harriss-Hardy and Dr. Cheryl Vrooman, unpublished 2004 study from the National Center for Homeless Education SERVE Center at the University of North Carolina Greensboro

Cc: School Board President Judy Appel and School Board Members
Berkeley Rent Stabilization Board Members
Jay Kelekian, Executive Director, Berkeley Rent Stabilization Program

2125 Milvia Street, Berkeley, California 94704
TEL: (510) 981-7368 (981-RENT) • TDD: (510) 981-6903 • FAX: (510) 981-4940
E-MAIL: rent@cityofberkeley.info • INTERNET: www.cityofberkeley.info/rent
Sustainable Communities Need Opportunity-Rich Schools: A Smart Growth Imperative

Jeffrey M. Vincent, Ph.D. and Deborah L. McKoy, Ph.D.

Surveying American citizens in 2012, the American Planning Association (APA) found that the top three priorities Americans want planners to spend their time on are job creation (70%), safety (69%), and schools (67%). The survey also found that education was the highest priority for targeting local funding. Planners—and particularly those that favor smart growth—already recognize the importance of workforce development and job creation, but too often fall short of extending their analysis and planning to a key foundation of strong regional economies: effective K-12 schools.

Most planners have no idea how they could help improve schools. Finding the mechanisms to link planning and infrastructure investments in communities and regions to efforts that improve K-12 schools is a complex and little understood endeavor. Yet, leaders across the country are increasingly looking for stronger connections between communities and public education.

As urban planners consider their priorities in the coming 15 years, it is imperative they recognize the role that K-12 education and high-quality schools play in realizing livable, equitable, and sustainable communities—and the role they play in contributing to K-12 educational quality. Today’s aging school facilities, outdated school siting policies, and restrictive land use policies and practices, as well as dynamic fluctuations in school enrollments and changes to traditional school enrollment, attendance boundaries, and zoning policies all demand new approaches that harness school, community, and regional prosperity. This essay provides urban planning professionals and the smart growth community with action steps to connect their urban planning and development work (which we refer to as “sustainable community planning”) to improving K-12 educational opportunities for all families.

Competitive and vibrant metropolitan regions of the future will have high-quality K-12 education systems that attract families, provide robust skill development, and bolster regional economic engines. The urban planning and community development literature is peppered with such declarations, yet dishearteningly short on policy prescriptions or an understanding of how to do so in practice. Although uneven distribution of K-12 school quality is shaping metropolitan regions by driving families from urban neighborhoods to suburbs, thereby creating sprawl, the planning field has largely ignored this trend. As Howell Baum noted in a 2004 article in the Journal of the American Planning Association, K-12 education is “a quintessential challenge in

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managing the sprawl system.”

The cost of not considering schools and education is great: if urban communities want to retain the talent of young families and have them choose residential locations that support regional sustainable community goals, then improving access to quality schools is critical to vibrancy and resiliency.

Persuading sustainable community planners to consider K-12 education requires that planners understand—and overcome—the persistent obstacles working against doing so. Three of the most significant challenges are as follows:

- **Concentrated poverty and racial and economic segregation undermine school quality.** Although regional demographics are in constant flux, one stubborn consistency remains: the prevalence of isolated, poverty-concentrated neighborhoods with high-poverty schools. Perhaps the most consistent finding in educational research is the tremendous academic achievement challenges for high-poverty schools. Socioeconomic conditions and especially poverty concentration predict student achievement. Education scholars find that the achievement gap is, in large part, a function of conditions that constitute an opportunity gap. That is, low-income families and their children face double jeopardy: their neighborhoods lack such opportunities as quality schools, quality child care, preschool, healthy environments, quality affordable housing, and legitimate or living-wage jobs with advancement opportunities. Urban planning scholars have framed this reality as the “uneven geography of opportunity,” where residents are cut off from the resources and amenities afforded by more affluent communities in the same region where schools are generally more successful, infrastructure investments are high, and jobs are more plentiful.

- **Out-of-school factors contribute significantly to in-school success.** Educational performance is a function of more than just what happens inside classrooms. Decades of research demonstrates that the ability to perform well in school requires a range of in- and out-of-school resources that together set the conditions for learning. Educational researcher Richard Rothstein argues, “[d]ifferences in the quality of schools can explain about one-third of the variation in student achievement. But the other two-thirds is attributable to non-school factors.”

So-called non-school factors include housing stability; neighborhood quality and safety; available and affordable transportation options; parent engagement; health care; accessibility of after-school programs, open space, and cultural amenities; and socioeconomic and racial segregation in neighborhoods and schools. Therefore, policies that influence these non-school factors, many of which planners can affect, must be examined for their impact on students and schools. “Unless concerted action is taken to alleviate the hardships and suffering related to poverty and to spur development that can

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lead to economic and social stability for communities and families, little change in the character and quality of urban schools in the United States will occur,” says Pedro Noguera, a prominent education scholar.  

- **Institutional and policy silos reinforce piecemeal approaches.** Typically, the work of urban planning institutions and educators rarely intersects, even though schools and communities have inherent relationships. “It is common sense that the quality of public education and the quality of cities affect one another, but rarely, if ever, are educational and urban policies connected,” says Bruce Katz, a prominent urban policy thinker. “Strategies are needed to do so to ensure better schools, healthier neighborhoods, and more vital cities.”

School districts and other local governments typically do not collaborate, even on matters obviously related to both education and land use, such as making school siting choices, school renovation and expansion decisions, changes to residential school attendance boundaries, coordinating school transportation services, and linking zoning for new housing developments to planning for school capacity requirements. This lack of collaboration, often referred to as the silo planning phenomenon, is largely a function of state policy or, in most cases, the lack of state policy, that would create incentives for collaboration, support cross-agency accountability, or mandate that planning and educational entities work together. In most states, school districts are largely independent jurisdictions that operate under a separate set of state policies and regulations from other local governments.

Given decades of unconnected work, local education agencies, municipalities, and regional agencies that would like to collaborate often do not know where to start and frequently do not trust one another. To help overcome these hurdles, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released *Voluntary School Siting Guidelines* to provide guidance to states and local entities on school siting planning. Still, policy and implementation practices for linking schools with sustainable community planning remain woefully lacking.

The Center for Cities & Schools (CC&S) at the University of California, Berkeley has developed an action framework that arms planners with tools and strategies to integrate schools and sustainable community planning. CC&S is an action-oriented policy and technical

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6 Interview with the authors, 2011.
9 http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu.
10 Adapted from a longer report: McKoy, Deborah L., Jeffrey M. Vincent, and Ariel H. Bierbaum. 2011. Opportunity-Rich Schools and Sustainable Communities: Seven Steps to Align High-Quality Education
assistance “think & do-tank” that promotes high-quality education as an essential component of urban and metropolitan vitality to create equitable, healthy, and sustainable communities. CC&S works extensively with local school districts, municipal and regional governments, state agencies, and federal agencies to document challenges, lessons, and successes. CC&S recommends the following seven steps to align high-quality education with sustainable community planning.

**Step 1: Know your educational landscape.**

Sustainable community planners must understand the educational options and policies in their region and how they affect choices families make about housing.

- **Understand local educational policies and demographics.** Map school district jurisdictions, identify key leaders and existing partnerships, understand school district attendance boundaries and assignment policies (which may not overlap perfectly with city boundaries), and chart student demographics.

- **Inventory educational and workforce assets.** This should include five categories: high-quality childcare and early learning, K-12 assets (such as programs that prepare students for college and careers), before- and after-school programs and support services, higher education, regional workforce preparation, and adult education.

- **Assess physical school infrastructure.** Know the conditional quality and capacity of existing school facilities and grounds, including plans for new construction and/or modernization.

Example: In Emeryville, California, an assessment of condition of the public school facilities inspired a new vision for school and community revitalization. As a result, the city and the school district have been partnering to plan and fund a new “Center of Community Life,” a renovated K-12 campus that doubles as a community center with before- and after-school programming and city-run programs, services, and activities for students and the community.  

**Step 2: Engage school stakeholders, families, and young people in sustainable community planning.**

Planners should ensure effective engagement of residents of all ages and the institutions that serve them.

- **Identify multiple ways for school district personnel to engage in planning.** Planning processes can be long and complex. Invite school districts to participate at critical junctures, such as when deciding housing unit mix or planning park space adjacent to schools.

- **Identify opportunities for students and parents to engage in planning and connect it to classroom learning.** Working with teachers, youth participation in sustainable community planning can be an especially effective way to link classroom learning to real-world experience.


• **Ensure meaningful and sustained engagement of school district personnel, students, and parents with appropriate capacity-building tools.** Provide accurate, timely information to ensure participation of these stakeholders.

Example: The Y-PLAN! (Youth – Plan, Learn, Act, Now!) is a proven methodology for engaging students and schools in local planning and community development projects. Developed by the Center for Cities & Schools at the University of California, Berkeley, Y-PLAN! has built capacity in school districts and local governments to promote youth leadership throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and is currently expanding to New York, Dallas, Washington, D.C., and Detroit.  

**Step 3: Create a shared vision linking community, regional, and educational prosperity.**

Use a robust and inclusive visioning process to unite participants around common goals.

• **Cultivate leadership and champions.** Strong, effective leadership will motivate and manage diverse stakeholders and move an integrated planning process forward.

• **Adopt the vision statement formally across institutions.** A vision statement can help ensure commitment to and sustainability of a shared mission.

• **Develop common indicators to measure change, foster shared accountability, and increase the effective use of scarce resources.** Executed properly, accountability metrics honor individual activities and collaborative efforts, measure changes in collaborative processes and policy/program implementation outcomes, and provide decision makers with objective means of measuring improvements in the use of increasingly scarce resources.

Example: In Charleston, South Carolina, a youth master plan was developed in collaboration with 16 municipalities in the region. The plan identifies seven goals to comprehensively support young people. The employment and transportation goal, for example, emphasizes the need for transportation options for students to get to and from internships and other work-based learning opportunities.

**Step 4: Support a family-friendly community through comprehensive services and desirable amenities.**

Create the right mix of these resources that will support and attract a diverse set of residents.

• **Provide comprehensive social services aligned with educational needs and opportunities.** Schools and service providers should tailor these “wrap-around” services and programs to the social and educational needs of students.

• **Provide quality amenities to attract families and enrich students’ lives.** Family-oriented attractions, such as early learning programs, high quality childcare, and open play space, attract families to a neighborhood and offer enrichment opportunities.

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12 http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/engaging.html.
- **Harness public and private funding to align program operations for efficiency.** Leverage and maximize a variety of funding streams, including public investment in schools, libraries, and other community infrastructure, as well as private investment in development. The latter often includes investment in community assets.

Example: The SUN Community Schools effort in Multnomah County, Oregon (Portland Metro) has transformed schools into full service community centers. Each of the 60+ SUN schools partners with community institutions such as libraries, parks, community centers, neighborhood health clinics, places of worship, and private businesses to provide social, health, and support services to students and families. 14

**Step 5: Align bricks-and-mortar investments in community assets.**

Use cross-sector partnerships to coordinate capital investments in schools, housing, transportation, and neighborhoods.

- **Establish schools as centers of complete communities.** Ensure adequate modernization and expansion of existing schools to bolster neighborhoods, maximize the joint use of school facilities, and site and design new schools so they are connected to neighborhoods and energy efficient.
- **Ensure family-oriented, mixed-income housing.** Mixed-income housing aims to decrease high concentrations of neighborhood poverty and provide affordable housing options for families at every income level, including school teachers and staff.
- **Pursue joint development with school districts.** Through joint development, two or more entities partner to plan, site, design, and build facilities.

Example: In California, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research is working with the California Department of Education to explore ways to improve state guidelines for encouraging collaborative local planning by municipalities and school districts. The 2013 planned update of the state's General Plan Guidelines presents a unique opportunity. 15

**Step 6: Maximize access to opportunity through affordable transportation options.**

Young people and families living in high-poverty, resource-limited neighborhoods require access to jobs, health services, and educational options. By developing more affordable, multimodal transportation options, municipalities can provide access to these opportunities.

- **Make areas surrounding schools safe for pedestrians and bicyclists.** Upgrades to sidewalks, bicycle lanes, street lighting, and street furniture improve the safety and vibrancy of public spaces and enable young people and their families to more easily access local schools.
- **Site schools to maximize multimodal transportation access.** Strategically locating schools allows them to serve as the home base for a range of academic and extracurricular activities.

• **Align transit options to support school choice and extracurricular opportunities.** Given that parents now have more choices than ever in which school(s) to send their children to, transit can play a key role in ensuring all families’ access to educational choices, including after-school activities.

• **Create incentives for multimodal transportation choices by students and families.** Urban design elements and neighborhood infrastructure that create safe and vibrant environments are critical to getting families with children walking and bicycling.

Example: In Baltimore, middle and high school students ride Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) buses at no cost. Baltimore City Public Schools contracts with MTA for the service, used by more than 25,000 students.¹⁶

**Step 7: Institutionalize ongoing innovation.**

Cross-sector collaboration needs to become business as usual. This should include a two-way system of accountability between schools and their communities.

• **Support inter-disciplinary capacity building for new professional practice, formal communication systems, and streamlined collaborative decision-making.** Job descriptions at public agencies—from school districts to transit agencies—should clearly communicate the need for collaborative skills.

• **Measure change, assess impacts, and leverage results.** New indicators and data will be needed to measure change, determine its effectiveness, and then make data-driven policy and program decisions.

• **Leverage diverse resources.** Now more than ever, economic conditions call for innovative partnerships that weave together diverse funding sources to maximize resources.

• **Balance what works with what could be.** Changing the status quo will depend on supporting effective policies with a proven track record and new policies that take risks and innovate.

Example: In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region of North Carolina, the county board, city council, community college board, and county library board adopted a joint resolution promoting joint use of public facilities. The resolution establishes the Joint Use Task Force with representation from two dozen agencies and works to align public capital investment in the region for shared use and reduced facility development costs.¹⁷

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A Call to Action for Smart Growth Planners

Given the critical importance of K-12 school quality to sustainable communities, urban planners and educators must align forces and collaborate. Although coordinated metropolitan planning and educational improvement efforts are foundations for prosperous schools, communities, and regions, they are too often pursued in isolation. Realizing the smart growth vision for sustainable communities over the coming decade requires that local governments, community leaders, developers, planners, and educators work together to plan and redevelop communities.

Jeffrey Vincent, Ph.D. and Deborah McKoy, Ph.D. co-founded the Center for Cities & Schools at the University of California-Berkeley. Contact: jvincent@berkeley.edu or debmckoy@berkeley.edu.
School Stability and School Performance

A Review of the Literature

While the topic of student mobility and its effects on school performance is of growing concern to educational researchers and practitioners, there remains a notable lack of rigorous scientific inquiry in this arena. A review of the literature reveals numerous studies addressing the topic in general; however, there exists a wide range of methodology and findings. While few studies were found to target homeless students in particular, the growing body of literature addressing mobility in general can be considered to inform issues related to school stability of homeless children and youth. The current review casts a wide net for purposes of identifying credible efforts to examine the relationship between student mobility and school performance and reporting findings that illuminate the issue.

The Issue of Mobility

Mobility is not a new phenomenon for educators (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003). Americans change residences more often than any other industrialized nation (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). Historically, these moves had been attributed to “upwardly mobile” families seeking to better themselves. However, during the 1970s, many of these moves were attributed to “downwardly mobile” families experiencing job loss, divorce, and other family issues (Popp, et al.). From the 1980s until the present, between 16% and 20% of the U.S. population move each year (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996; Kariuki & Nash, 1999). Currently, in urban settings where mobility is more of an issue, it is not unusual to have a 50% turnover rate in elementary schools (Kerbow, Azcoitia, & Buell, 2003; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). Even a short distance residential move can result in a change in schools in an urban area.

Mobility as discussed in this literature review refers to students moving during grades K-12. Students who move several times during a school year are considered to be “highly mobile” (Popp, et al., 2003). The types of students who are typically highly mobile are children of migrant workers (Gouwens, 2001), military, families experiencing homelessness, and other unstable...
work/home situations related to high poverty (Popp, et al.). Mobility may refer to residential moves (of a short or long distance), a change in schools, or both, leading to confusion in research studies (Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Wright, 1999).

Frequent moves can have a negative impact on a student’s academic routine and potential success (Alexander, et al, 1996; Family Housing Fund, 2003; Kariuki & Nash, 1999; Popp, et al., 2003). Mobility and absenteeism are often associated with poor school performance (Alexander, et al.). When students were administered a measure of stressful life events, researchers found that students reported changing schools being as stressful as the hospitalization or incarceration of a parent (Alexander, et al.). Moving is especially stressful for children who are homeless because they may already be worrying about where they will be sleeping at night or if they will have food to eat (Rafferty, 1998). In addition to being unprepared for school due to lack of supplies, and no time or place to do homework, there also may be changes in curriculum from school to school (Noll & Watkins, 2003). Based on the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of over 10,000 California high school students, Rumberger & Larson (1998) concluded that the risk of dropping out of high school is greater for students who are highly mobile during their first eight years of school than that of their less mobile peers. Further analysis of this six-year study led Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Polardy (1999) to report a tendency for highly mobile students to suffer psychologically, socially, and academically. Mobility is also shown to negatively impact the classrooms and schools that have high rates of student mobility, impacting non-mobile as well as mobile students. A study of Texas students (Mao, Whitsett, & Mellor, 1998) found that students who were stable scored better on state standard achievement tests than their more mobile peers. While findings support a relationship between increased mobility and decreased academic performance, this relationship cannot be considered to be causal due to limitations inherent to the research design.

In a literature review on student mobility and academic success conducted for the Family Housing Fund (2003), researchers found that stability may be more important to children in primary grades because these are critical learning periods. They also found that children who were highly mobile more often were suspended (attributed to poor adjustment) and missed additional time away from school. Importantly, researchers reported that while the direct effect of mobility on achievement and adjustment was small, mobility is especially detrimental to children in families that are experiencing multiple stressors. Changing residences during stressful times exacerbates an already critical situation. According to the literature review, stable
housing and strategies for schools to use to increase continuity for students are recommended (Family Housing Fund, 2003).

**Mobility and School Performance**

While there exists an apparent relationship between mobility and academic achievement, Kerbow, Azcoitia, and Buell (2003) suggest that students who move once during their school career rarely suffer any lasting effects. After analyzing six years of mathematic achievement data from Chicago Public Schools, the researchers reported that students moving once during a school year may achieve academically 10% less than expected. If, however, the students remain in their new schools for the remainder of their education, they are likely to overcome losses (Kerbow, Azcoitia, & Buell, 2003). The story is not the same for students who move more frequently. Kerbow, et al. suggest that the recovery time increases as the student continues to move. A major concern is that students may fail to learn certain basic concepts that they need later in school. This educational disruption may be particularly important for mathematics and reading. Likewise, highly mobile students enter classrooms at different times, possibly missing crucial information. It is also important to note that such students must adapt to different teaching styles and fellow classmates’ abilities with each move (Kerbow, et al.).

Several studies suggest a relationship between mobility and academic achievement as highly mobile students tend to perform at a level below that of their stable counterparts (Attles, 1997; Alexander, et al., 1996; Family Housing Fund, 2003; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). The United States General Accounting Office (GAO, 1994) reported that, controlling for family income, children who have changed schools three or more times since first grade are much more likely to have repeated a grade or to have low reading scores by the third grade. Wood, Halfon, and Scarlata (1993) also found that students who moved frequently were more likely to have repeated a grade. Astone and McLanahan (1994), after controlling for several family and demographic factors, found that frequent mobility is associated with dropping out of school. Few reviewed studies examined school performance prior to mobility, thus precluding examination of a possible relationship between the two variables (Temple & Reynolds, 1999).

Attles (1997) found that homelessness/mobility has an adverse effect on academic achievement in a study of seven homeless children in grades 5-8. Attles proposes that without educational interventions, such students will continue to have academic problems for up to a year, even if their living conditions improve. The author states that results from this study may not be representative of other children experiencing homelessness because all of the
participants lived in the same shelter and attended the same school during the study, but her findings do point to a trend of academic difficulty due to mobility.

In a study examining school transfers during the first five years of elementary school, researchers found that more frequent moves (two or more) seem to impact reading performance more than other skill areas (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996). Participants were a representative (random) sample of 767 elementary school students (K-5). Researchers (Alexander, et al. 1996) found that students of color and lower socio-economic status (SES) often transferred within the city school system (short distance moves), while white students with higher SES often transferred out of the city school system (long distance moves). After the five-year period, more mobile students had lower test scores and grades, were more likely to drop out, and were more likely to receive special education services than were the higher SES students. When the researchers (Alexander, et al.) controlled for family background factors (parents’ education, ethnicity, family SES, etc.), however, many of these findings were no longer significant. Test scores taken prior to the study indicate that differences in school performance “predate children’s school moves.” The authors (Alexander, et al.) suggest that other factors, especially the home and family circumstances, cause children to move.

The Family Housing Fund (2003) has coordinated several studies, including the Kids Mobility Study. This study examined mobility and academic achievement through interviews with 100 families. Researchers found that elementary school students who changed residences three or more times during the school year had average reading scores half that of students who did not move. The study also documented the connection between attendance and achievement. Students with nearly perfect attendance on average had reading scores 20 points higher than those who attended less than 84% of the time (Family Housing Fund, 2003). Attendance is an issue for highly mobile students who may have to miss school due to school policy barriers as well as participation in the act of moving itself.

The issue of mobility and achievement in urban school systems has been a concern of educators for some time (McKenna & Goddard, 2002). In a study of Chicago elementary school students, only 50% of its students remained enrolled in the school over a three-year period (Kerbow, et al., 2003). Residential moves accounted for the majority of changes, but over two-fifths were school-related. Many students moved within a small network of schools connected by geography, racial/ethnic composition, and poverty (Kerbow, et al.). The authors found less academic growth in highly mobile students when compared to non-mobile students, all other factors being equal. The authors
focused on the frequent movers (i.e., students who move three or more times before sixth grade). These students can be as much as a year behind their non-mobile counterparts (Kerbow, et al.).

In another study in the Chicago area, the Chicago Longitudinal Study, Temple & Reynolds (1999) examined the effects of school mobility on reading and math achievement for 1,087 low-income African American seventh-graders. They found that 73% of students changed schools at least once and 21% changed three or more times between grades K-7. Temple & Reynolds controlled for predictors and consequences of school mobility through their longitudinal design. Predictors of school mobility included prior achievement, number of years of preschool participation in an education intervention program, and parent education. Although students who frequently changed schools were a year behind non-mobile students on reading and math, the researchers suggest that only half of this difference can be attributed to mobility. Other reported reasons for low achievement are related to prior school performance. Adverse effects, however, were seen in children who moved only twice. Consequences of mobility were lower for students who moved into better schools. The researchers found that frequent mobility (not just occasional mobility) significantly increases the risk of underachievement.

Finally, a study of homeless children in New York City found that these students were less likely to score at or above grade level in reading or in mathematics, as measured by citywide achievement tests (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; also see McChesney, 1993). Homeless students also were more likely to repeat grades, and their school attendance was worse than that of other New York City students (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991). Non-attendance, excessive numbers of school transfers, and poor conditions in shelters (66% had been in at least two shelters, 29% had been in at least four, and 10% had been in at least seven or more shelters) were judged to be important factors in educational underachievement among homeless children (Rafferty & Shinn). Rafferty and Shinn found that homeless children experience a number of stressors that may have a cumulative effect and impact the overall well being of children.

**Confounding variables**

Several studies found that mobility was not the only variable related to low school achievement (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1996; Heinlein & Shinn, 2000; Jeynes, 2002; McKenna & Goddard, 2002; Wright, 1999). There is some argument in the literature about the level of impact mobility has on student achievement (McKenna & Goddard, 2002). Part of the reason for this debate is that the term “mobility” is defined in different ways. Another issue is that
mobility is highly correlated with other variables, such as SES, poverty, and homelessness.

Wright examined the mobility and academic achievement of third- and fourth-graders across 33 elementary schools over a 12-month period. Sixty-eight percent were ethnic minorities, and 71% were eligible for free or reduced lunches. The researcher found that low achievement scores were associated with students moving within the school district rather than out of the school district. Mobility as a variable was determined, however, to be confounded by low family income and ethnic minority status. The author suggests that low family income and ethnic minority status had a stronger relationship to low achievement scores than did mobility on its own (Wright). Wright also states that other factors related to achievement may be primary language, family income, ethnicity, grade level, and early school achievement. Wright suggests that student mobility may have implications beyond achievement, such as the assumption of classroom continuity when there clearly is not student population stability over time. Finally, Wright states that mobility should be considered one of many risk factors that must be addressed by teachers via classroom practices and curriculum and by the school structure, viewing mobility as an actuality, not the exception.

McKenna and Goddard (2002) examined the relationship between student mobility and reading achievement in a high-mobility, low-income urban elementary school. The researchers (McKenna & Goddard) also look at trends that may be useful in addressing the impact of high mobility on the classroom experience. Participants were chosen from one elementary school in Canada that was described as low income, urban, and ethnically diverse. In terms of the impact of student mobility on literacy, the researchers found that mobility itself was not a major factor in reading ability. In fact, most of the students fell into two groups: (1) at reading level and (2) two years below reading level regardless of the number of moves they made over a two-year period. The authors (McKenna & Goddard) suggest that more research, including longitudinal studies, needs to be performed to assess the influence of mobility on school performance. At this time, there appears to be inconclusive evidence in regards to mobility as the primary factor in low academic achievement. McKenna and Goddard suggest looking at the interaction of factors such as clustering highly mobile students in one classroom, SES, limited English proficient families, single parent homes, and first-generation students. Several limitations were reported including the literacy assessment used and lack of background information on the families as well as the reason for their mobility. McKenna and Goddard do report that mobility is a contributing factor and suggest that it greatly impacts teachers’ ability to teach and students’ ability to learn.
The Kids Mobility Study (Family Housing Fund, 2003) also addressed the possible relationship between mobility and other factors that influence academic achievement for elementary school students. Most (75%) families were selected because of their high mobility and because they were experiencing other stressors such as job loss, divorce, abuse, or poor housing. Researchers found that socioeconomic levels, race, out-of-state or -country birth, family structure, and attendance as well as mobility had a strong relationship to reading achievement. Teachers also reported that these students had higher absenteeism rates, lower academic achievement, and difficulty with social and emotional adjustment (Family Housing Fund, 2003).

Need for further research

Several authors suggest that more research is needed to determine the effects of student mobility on academic achievement (Fisher & Matthews, 1999; Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003; Temple & Reynolds, 1999). Temple and Reynolds suggest that few studies examining the effects of frequency of mobility and school stability on achievement are available. In addition, analysis of the prevalence, predictors of, and consequences of mobility need to be examined as well as the reasons why children move (Temple & Reynolds). Similarly, the Kids Mobility Project points to two possible areas for future research: 1) the development and testing of targeted intervention efforts to help explain the interrelationship of variables shown to impact student outcomes and 2) research to identify and quantify relationships between inadequate housing and school achievement and/or other factors that impact housing, such as family stability and employment (Family Housing Fund, 2003).

Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber’s (1996) review of the literature is consistent with other studies in that the evidence for the impact of mobility on school performance and academic achievement is inconclusive. Some findings reported were just short of statistical significance, while other researchers reported no evidence for the connection. Alexander et al. (1996) suggest that researchers need to operationalize their definition of mobility. For example, researchers typically use mobility to describe either a change in residence or a change in schools or both. It is not known which of those moves are more influential for children’s school performance or their perceptions of one being more or less stressful than others. The kind of move (short or long distance), reason for the move (upward mobility or family instability), and other variables (such as family background) all seem to be important factors to consider. Also the timing for the move (middle of school year or summertime) as well as age of the child must be considered. Researchers
must be careful not to compare mobile versus non-mobile students without taking into consideration other aforementioned factors (Alexander, et al.).

Temple and Reynolds cite three methodological problems with studies on mobility and school achievement:

1. School mobility is measured either at one point in time or retrospectively, both precluding causal or predictive findings. (Longitudinal studies are best.)
2. Premobility is often not taken into account. (Studies that do not include controls for achievement or other measures of school adjustment prior to mobility will overestimate the effects of school mobility.)
3. There are few mobility studies on lower income children in urban schools. If mobility is detrimental to school achievement then it is more likely to affect lower income students who have fewer resources and support (Temple & Reynolds).

Fisher and Matthews (1999) suggest that few studies have examined school stability interventions or remediation of highly mobile students. They recommend that researchers should examine the impact of sporadic attendance and school mobility on the academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment of students. Although studies have examined seasonal/migrant patterns of attendance and academic achievement, fewer studies have examined students who may move less predictably (i.e., homeless students). Extra-curricular programs also need to be explored (Fisher & Matthews).

In conclusion, literature documents the positive relationship between school stability and school performance of students in general, with some, albeit limited, attention to variables inherent in homelessness. More research, however, is warranted to answer many of the questions that have yet to be explored regarding school success for students experiencing homelessness.

References


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Beth Garriss Hardy, Ph.D.
Cheryl Vrooman, Ed.D.


