

A Revolving Door: Challenges and Solutions to Educating Mobile Students

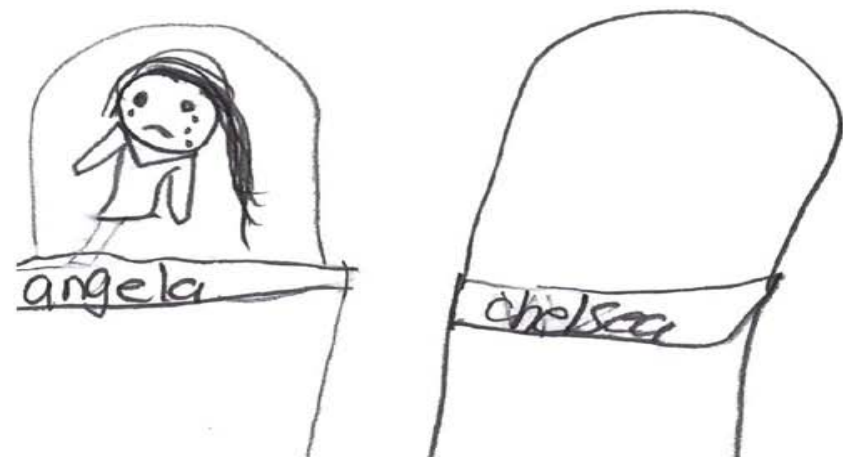
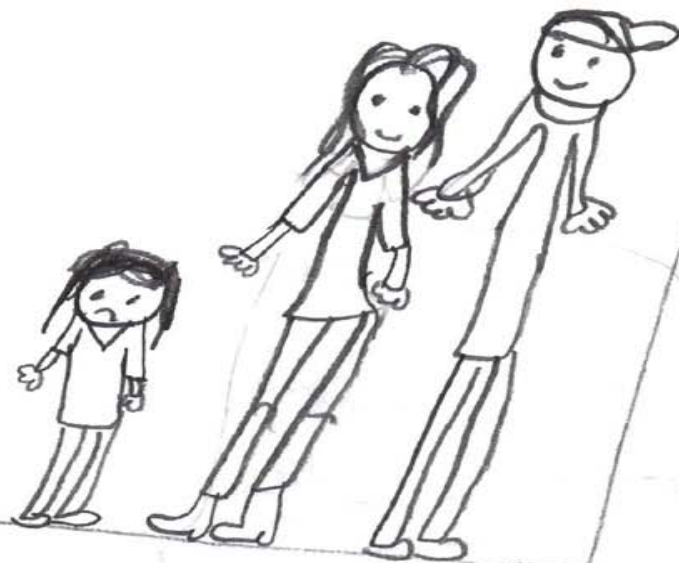
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Think back to when you were a student

- ☐ Did you ever switch schools during the school year?
- ☐ Did one of your close friends switch schools?
- ☐ How did it make you feel?

Sad because I feel like
noone will like me.







Why student mobility matters

- National research suggests that mobility has a negative impact on mobile students' academic achievement.
- In Massachusetts:
 - Students who change schools during the school year tend to have lower MCAS scores and less academic growth than their non-mobile peers.
 - Low-income, Hispanic and Black students are more likely than white or affluent students to change schools during the school year. Student mobility may contribute to already-existing achievement gaps between these groups.

Mobility in Massachusetts (2008-09)

- 100,994 students statewide either transferred into or out of a public school at least once resulting in a statewide churn rate of 10.3.
- Student mobility is not prevalent in all of the Commonwealth's school districts.
- High churn rates are most common in the state's urban districts.

Gateway City Districts (2009-10)

District	Churn rate	Approximate # of students
Holyoke	27.6	1,800
Springfield	23.2	6,346
Fitchburg	22.3	1,231
Lawrence	22.2	3,018
New Bedford	18.6	2,526
Worcester	18.0	4,619
Lowell	17.1	2,450
Fall River	15.8	1,657
Brockton	15.5	2,579
Haverhill	15.4	1,124
Pittsfield	12.9	830

Study participants

- 6 districts
 - ▣ 5 superintendents/assistant superintendents
 - ▣ 6 district staff members
- 11 schools with churn rates ranging from 15.9 to 39.6
 - ▣ 13 principals/assistant principals
 - ▣ 11 teachers
 - ▣ 8 school staff members
 - ▣ 136 students

Causes

- Housing instability
- Immigration
- Changes in employment
- Family instability

Challenge 1: Obtaining students' records

**“Without student records,
we are flying blind.”**

Potential solutions

- ❑ Dedicated staff person to facilitate in-take process
- ❑ Assign new students to a short-term “transition” classroom
- ❑ Conduct immediate and comprehensive screening to obtain information that will aid in making placement decisions
- ❑ Statewide electronic records transfer system

Challenge 2: Serving academic needs

“Sometimes there’s been such an interruption to their schooling that we’re scrambling to make up what the child has lost. And there’s an adjustment period every time they enter a new school so there’s even more loss of learning time.”

Potential solutions

- Teacher professional development
- Academic specialists
- Tutoring programs
- Flexible funding system
- Independent study for students who arrive very late in the school year
- Competency –based education

Challenge 3: Serving non-academic needs

“The social-emotional needs of some of these students outweigh their educational needs.”

“The mental health issues are huge, because they’re not ready to learn. If they’re not in one place long enough for someone to assess the need, they go from place to place always having that need.”

Potential solutions

- ❑ Teacher professional development
- ❑ School staff who can work with students who have social, emotional and behavioral needs
- ❑ School-based services for students and their families
- ❑ Improve access to and use of community partners who can provide services
- ❑ Greater collaboration among state agencies

Challenge 4: Engaging students

“They have so many needs at so many different levels—it adds another layer of complexity to reaching and engaging these students.”

“It’s very difficult to work with a student who does not want to be there.”

Potential solutions

- Teacher professional development
- Administer a background and interests survey that will provide staff with information about the student
- Assign each new student a “buddy” or “ambassador”
- Encourage new students to join extra-curricular activities
- Hold school-wide “acquaintanceship” activities
- Address the needs that impact students’ readiness to learn

Challenge 5: Meeting accountability targets

“It’s like trying to hit a moving target.”

Potential solutions

- Modify the current accountability system

“We have students coming and going on a regular basis, and you say that the expectation is that we run the race as far and as fast as a community where student mobility is almost non-existent? Why is it that the system expects the same results in the same period of time—when a whole group of students are carrying a ton of additional burden on their backs? This puzzles me all the time.”

Strategies for reducing mobility

- ❑ Increase family engagement.
- ❑ Examine patterns of mobility and implement policies and practices that will reduce it.
- ❑ Provide transportation to students' whose families move outside the school attendance zone.
- ❑ Build community awareness about the consequences of mobility.
- ❑ Increase collaboration among state agencies (especially education, housing and human services) to address the root causes.

Considerations for state policymakers

- ❑ Expand current efforts to better understand the implications of student mobility and support districts most impacted.
- ❑ Develop the Readiness Passport.
- ❑ Develop a more flexible and responsive funding system.
- ❑ Consider how to incorporate student mobility into the state accountability system.
- ❑ Encourage schools of education to include coursework and training on working with both mobile and non-mobile students in classrooms with high turnover.
- ❑ Collaboration among state agencies to address the root causes of student mobility.

Thank You!

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