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A Revolving Door: Challenges and Solutions to Educating Mobile Students

In Collaboration with MassINC's Gateway Cities Initiative

GATEWAY cities

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About MassINC's Gateway Cities Initiative

The Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC) is a nonpartisan not-for-profit organization devoted to promoting a public agenda to support the growth and vitality of the middle class. Since 2007, MassINC has worked with 11 key regional Gateway Cities to rekindle the social, economic, and civic innovation that older industrial communities need to compete and prosper in the nation's 21st century economy. This effort leverages research, and a network of local leaders and engaged citizens, to identify policy priorities and propel action on a comprehensive, evidence-based, community-change agenda. Visit www.massinc.org to read MassINC's most recent report, *Going for Growth: New Education-Housing Partnerships to Stabilize Mobile Families and Boost Student Achievement.*

About RENNIE CENTER for Education Research & Policy

The Rennie Center's mission is to develop a public agenda that informs and promotes significant improvement in public education in Massachusetts. Our work is motivated by a vision of and education system that creates the opportunity to educate every child to be successful in life, citizenship, employment and life-long learning. Applying non-partisan, independent research, journalism and civic engagement, the Rennie Center is creating a civil space to foster thoughtful public discourse to inform and shape effective policy. For more information, please visit, www.renniecenter.org.

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Introduction

The typical image of students' progression through public school is one in which students arrive in September, learn together for the next 180 days, enjoy a summer break, and return to the same school again the following year with the same group of classmates. The reality—especially in many urban schools—is very different. In these schools, the picture is one of a revolving door in and out of the school, with students entering and exiting throughout the school year. In some urban schools, more than half of students change schools during the course of one year.

The problem of students changing schools in the middle of the school year is not new. The consequences of these changes, however, are increasingly dire. Student mobility, defined as students' movement into and out of schools and districts during a school year, is particularly prevalent among low-income, immigrant and minority children, whose families are often susceptible to changes in housing that precipitate changes in the schools they attend. In an era in which all students are held to high standards and a high school diploma is the minimum credential needed to secure gainful employment, the disruption caused by moving from school to school—sometimes multiple times within one school year—can have devastating results.

A growing body of research suggests that mobility has a negative impact on mobile students' academic achievement.[1] Findings from a recent Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) study revealed that mobile students are not as successful as non-mobile students on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests, even after controlling for low-income status.[2] The study found that non-mobile students scored in the Advanced or Proficient categories at higher rates than mobile students on both the English language arts (ELA) and mathematics tests, a staggering 24 percentage points greater in both cases. Median student growth percentiles (SGP)[3] were also higher for non-mobile students on both tests. Even among students with similar socioeconomic backgrounds, non-mobile students performed better on both exams and had higher growth scores than their mobile peers.

There are considerable negative consequences not only for the students who move into and out of schools over the course of a single school year, but also for the teachers, students and the whole culture of the school from which these children depart and to which they arrive. Meeting the needs of a constantly changing student body is difficult. In an effort to gain insight into the challenges schools face in serving a mobile student body, the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy conducted a study among a small sample of Massachusetts' schools with high rates of student mobility.

The focus of the study was on Massachusetts' Gateway Cities, 11 former industrial mill cities deemed "gateways" to the next era of the state's economic success and key portals for their diverse, often foreign-born, residents' ongoing pursuit of the American Dream. The Gateway Cities of Brockton, Fall River, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Springfield, Pittsfield and Worcester are cities with high poverty rates and low levels of educational attainment. In the 11 school districts in the Gateway Cities, 35,000 students switched schools at least once during the 2008–09 school year, representing 35% of all mobile students statewide. In some of these districts, nearly one-third of the students changed schools during the course of the year.

While individual schools and districts in Massachusetts have developed strategies for overcoming the challenges associated with student mobility, the state has not developed policies and practices for preventing it or addressing the challenges it presents. This report describes the scale of Massachusetts' student mobility problem and the challenges student mobility presents in 11 schools in 6 Gateway City districts. The report also provides examples of promising strategies for overcoming these challenges and better serving mobile students and non-mobile students attending schools with high student turnover. The final section puts forth considerations for action for Massachusetts policymakers.

1 For a review of published research on academic and non-academic outcomes of student mobility, see: United States Government Accountability Office. (November 2010). *K-12 Education: Many Challenges Arise in Educating Students Who Change Schools Frequently,* GAO-11-40.

2 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (August 2010). *Education Research Brief: Student Mobility in Massachusetts.*

3 Student Growth Percentiles measure how much student performance changed relative to other students statewide with similar scores in previous years.

Purpose and Methods

The purpose of the study was to shed light on the challenges associated with student mobility and promising strategies for overcoming them. The study was conducted in three phases; each phase of the project is described below.

1. **Analysis of mobility rates.** Data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) was analyzed to provide a better understanding of the scale of Massachusetts' mobility problem and the characteristics of students and districts that are most affected. DESE data were also used to examine student mobility trends in the Gateway Cities over the last three school years (2007–08, 2008–09, 2009–10).
2. **Qualitative interviews.** Interviews were conducted with staff in a small sample of schools in 6 Gateway City districts to provide insight into the challenges faced by districts and schools with high mobility rates. Characteristics of participating schools and districts are shown in Appendix A. The sample selection process and the interview protocols are also described in Appendix A.
3. **Literature review.** A review of recent research and literature was conducted to gather information on school, district and state education policies designed to address challenges associated with student mobility.

Phase 2 data collection occurred in Spring 2011. All 6 districts and 11 out of the 12 invited schools participated.[4] A total of 43 school and district staff members were interviewed for the study. (See Appendix B for a list of all study participants.)

Interviews with district staff. One-on-one telephone interviews were conducted with the superintendent and/or the person in the district identified by the superintendent as most knowledgeable about issues related to student mobility. Interviews were conducted with 5 superintendents/assistant superintendents and 6 district staff members.

Interviews with school staff. In-person interviews were conducted with staff in 11 schools. In most schools, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the school principal; the person in the school identified by the principal as most knowledgeable about issues related to student mobility; and a teacher (identified by the principal) who has had students move in and out of his/her classroom. Interviews were conducted with 13 principals/assistant principals, 11 teachers and 8 school staff members.

Student drawings. The study also sought to understand the impact of mobility on students from the students' perspective—a point of view seldom explored by researchers. Student drawings were selected as the methodology because in comparison to other methods, they provide a way to collect valid and reliable information anonymously from full classrooms of students in a short amount of time (less than 15 minutes). For this study, participating teachers were invited to have their students participate in the optional classroom exercise. A carefully constructed prompt for the exercise was developed by the Rennie Center research team based on the work of other researchers who have used student drawings to gain insight into educational practices and issues. (For example, Haney, Russell & Bebel, 2004 document a decade of work in this area in their article *Drawing on Education: Using Drawings to Document Schooling and Support Change*.[5]) Students in the class were asked to think about the times when a new student joins the class, or when a classmate leaves the class to go to another school. They were then asked to draw a picture of how the class changes and how it makes them feel. Students were given approximately ten minutes to complete their drawings. Students were given the option of including words to explain their drawing. Students who did not want to draw were given the option of providing a written response. Student participation was voluntary and anonymous (no names or personal identifiers were collected).

A total of 7 classes participated in the drawing exercise, 5 elementary/middle school classrooms and 2 high school classes. Drawings were collected from a total of 136 students. Students' drawings and written responses were coded and analyzed for patterns. Despite the small sample of classrooms, the analysis provides some insights on how mobility may impact students.

4 Difficulty scheduling interviews during the data collection period prevented one of the schools in Haverhill from participating.

5 Haney, W., Russell, M. & Bebel, D. Drawing on Education: Using Drawings to Document Schooling and Support Change. (2004). *Harvard Educational Review,* 74(3), 241-272.

Mobility Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools

This section provides an overview of student mobility in Massachusetts, including the metrics used to measure mobility, the statewide incidence and an examination of mobility rates in the 11 Gateway City districts.

Statewide Incidence

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) calculates and reports three different rates to gauge the extent to which students transfer into and out of public schools: churn rate, in-take rate, and stability rate. Churn rate is a metric that describes the percentage of students who transfer in or out. In-take rate is a metric that describes the percentage of students who transfer in. Stability rate is a metric that describes the percentage of students who remain in their school throughout the course of particular school year. Mobility rates are calculated at the state, district and school levels. Yearly rates are calculated to reflect the mobility that occurs within a given school year.[6]

During the 2008–09 school year, 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%.[7] During that same school year, 44,074 students entered the Massachusetts public school system after the start of the school year, representing a statewide in-take rate of 4.5%.[8] A total of 914,601 students remained in their school throughout the course of the 2008–09 school year, resulting in a statewide stability rate of 95.0%.[9]

Statewide, low-income, Hispanic, Black and special education students are disproportionately more mobile than their peers.[10]

- **Low-income students,** who make up 31% of the student body statewide, represent slightly more than half (53%) of the state's mobile students.
- **Hispanic students** make up 14% of the student body statewide but represent 29% of the state's mobile students.
- **Black students** make up 8% of the student body statewide but represent 16% of the state's mobile students.
- **Special education students** represent 17% of the student body statewide but account for close to one-quarter (24%) of the state's mobile students.

State-level Mobility Rates

- **Churn rate** is the number of students who transferred into or out of a public school in the state at any time during the school year divided by the number of students enrolled at any point in time during the school year.
- **In-take rate** is the number of students who entered the Massachusetts public education system after the start of the school year divided by the number of students enrolled in a public school at any point in time during the school year.
- **Stability rate** is the number of students who continuously enrolled in the same Massachusetts public school throughout the school year divided by the number of students enrolled in a public school as of October 1.

6 For a more complete explanation of DESE's mobility measures, visit: http://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/mobility/0710.pdf.

7 Based on figures from the 2008–09 school year reported by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in *Student Mobility Rates in Massachusetts Public Schools,* 2007–08 and 2008–09.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Based on figures from the 2008-09 school year reported in: O'Donnell, R & Gazos, A. (August 2010). *Student Mobility in Massachusetts.* Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

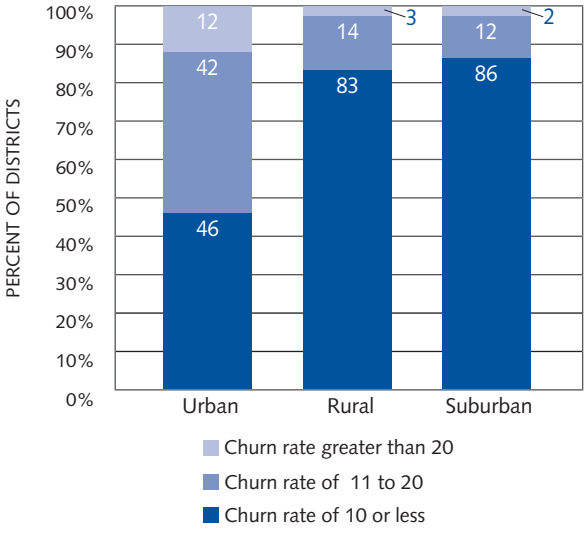
Student mobility is not prevalent in all of the Commonwealth's school districts. There are 391 school districts in the state—this includes charter and vocational technical schools which are classified as districts. As shown in Table 1, a majority of districts (75%) had a churn rate of 10 or less in 2009–10, which means 10% or less of the student body transferred into or out of a school in the district during that school year.

TABLE 1. Distribution of district churn rates (2009–10)

CHURN RATE	# OF DISTRICTS	% OF DISTRICTS
Less than 5	77	20
5 to 10	213	55
11 to 20	83	21
21 to 30	14	4
31 to 50	1	>1
Greater than 50	3	1
TOTAL	391	100

High mobility rates are most common in the state's urban districts. Figure 1 shows the distribution of churn rates for urban, rural and suburban districts. Over half of the state's urban districts (54%) had more than 10% of their student body enter or leave throughout the course of the 2009–10 school year compared to just 14% of suburban districts and 17% of rural districts.

FIGURE 1. Distribution of churn rates by location of district (2009–10)



District-level Churn Rate

District-level churn rate is the number of students who transferred into or out of a school in the district at any time during the school year divided by the number of students enrolled in the district at any point in time during the school year. The district-level churn rate accounts for students who moved within the district as well as students who moved into and out of the district.

For example: In Boston, the state's largest urban district, the churn rate was 24% in 2009–10 which means approximately 14,275 students transferred into or out of a school in the district during the school year. In Pittsfield, one of the state's smaller urban districts, the churn rate was 13% which means approximately 830 students transferred into or out of a school in the district in 2009–10.

Student mobility is concentrated in Massachusetts' lowest performing districts. Recently, DESE identified 9 districts in which the 35 lowest performing schools in the state are located (referred to as Level 4 schools). Within these 9 districts, 45,914 students moved at least once during the 2008–09 school year, accounting for 45% of all mobile students statewide.[11]

There are 21 districts where 20% or more of the students enter or leave a school in the district during the school year.

- Over half (12 out of 21) of these districts are located in urban areas.
- About half (11 out of 21) are traditional school districts (not charter or vocational technical schools).
- As shown in Table 2, 4 of the 11 traditional districts are in Gateway Cities, and 4 of the 11 traditional districts have Level 4 schools.

TABLE 2. Traditional school districts with highest churn rates (2009–10)

DISTRICT	LOCATION	GATEWAY CITY	INCLUDES LEVEL 4 SCHOOLS	CHURN RATE
Savoy	Rural			30.0
Mohawk Trail	Rural			28.6
Holyoke	Urban	X	X	27.6
Boston	Urban		X	24.3
Springfield	Urban	X	X	23.2
Fitchburg	Urban	X		22.3
Lawrence	Urban	X	X	22.2
Arlington	Suburban			21.6
Winchester	Suburban			20.3
Medford	Urban			20.2
Manchester Essex Regional	Suburban			20.2

A majority of the state's lowest performing schools have over 20% of their students enter or leave during the school year. A majority (31 out of 35) of the state's lowest performing schools (referred to as Level 4 schools) had a churn rate over 20% in 2009–10 (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. Distribution of churn rates in Level 4 schools (2009-10)

CHURN RATE	# OF SCHOOLS	% OF SCHOOLS
Less than 5	0	0
5 to 10	1	3
11 to 20	3	9
21 to 30	19	54
31 to 50	11	31
Greater than 50	1	3
TOTAL	35	100

School-level Churn Rate

School-level churn rate is the number of students who transferred into or out of the school at any time during the school year divided by the number of students enrolled in the school at any point in time during the school year.

For example, in 2009–10, the churn rate at Jeremiah E. Burke High (Boston) was 60%, which means about 542 students transferred into or out of the school that year. At White Street Elementary (Springfield), the churn rate was 41% which means about 190 students transferred into or out of the school during 2009–10.

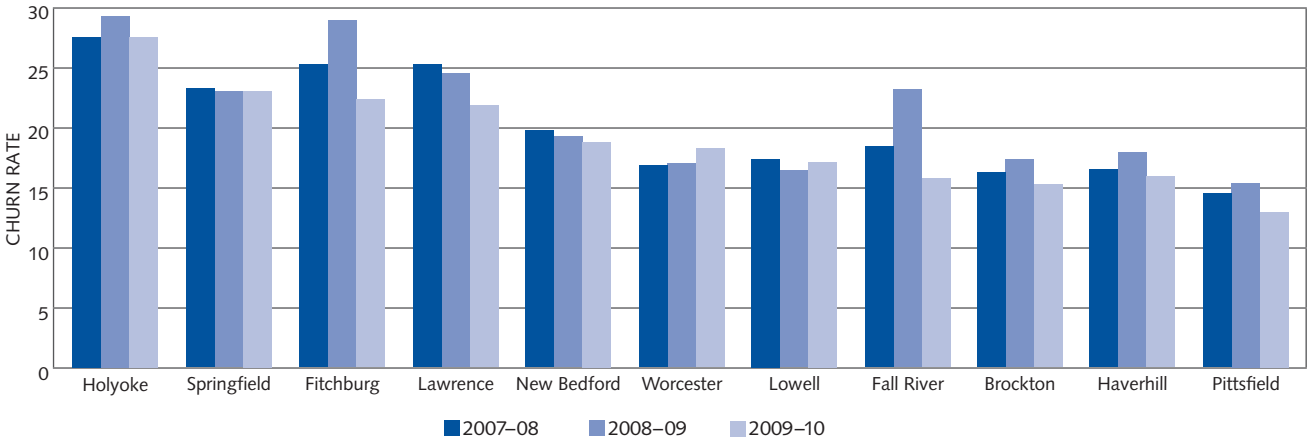
11 Based on figures from the 2008–09 school year reported in: O'Donnell, R & Gazos, A. (August 2010). *Student Mobility in Massachusetts.* Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Mobility in the Gateway Cities

Student mobility is prevalent among Massachusetts' Gateway Cities.[12] In the 11 school districts in the Gateway Cities, 35,000 students switched schools at least once during the 2008–09 school year, representing 35% of all mobile students statewide. In some of these districts, nearly one-third of the students changed schools during the course of the year.

Over the last three years, churn rates in Gateway City districts have ranged from a high of 28.9 to a low of 12.9. As shown in Figure 2, most of the Gateway City districts have had some fluctuation in their churn rates. In Lawrence and New Bedford, churn rates have decreased, and in Worcester they have increased. Among Gateway Cities, churn rates have been highest in Holyoke, Springfield, Fitchburg and Lawrence.

FIGURE 2. Churn rates: Percentage of students who transferred into or out of a school in the district over the course of the school year (2007–08, 2008–09, 2009–10)



Last year, Holyoke had the highest churn rate among the Gateway Cities at 27.6, which translates into approximately 1,800 students entering or leaving during the school year. Pittsfield had the lowest churn rate at 12.9 which translates into approximately 830 students entering or leaving during the school year. As shown in Table 4, Springfield, the largest district in the Gateway Cities, had approximately 6,346 students transfer into or out of schools in the district in 2009–10.

TABLE 4. Churn rates and number of students who transferred into or out of schools in Gateway City districts (2009–10)

DISTRICT	ADJUSTED ENROLLMENT	CHURN RATE	# OF STUDENTS WHO TRANSFERRED IN OR OUT
Holyoke	6,521	27.6	1,800
Springfield	27,355	23.2	6,346
Fitchburg	5,519	22.3	1,231
Lawrence	13,595	22.2	3,018
New Bedford	13,578	18.6	2,526
Worcester	25,663	18.0	4,619
Lowell	14,325	17.1	2,450
Fall River	10,486	15.8	1,657
Brockton	16,639	15.5	2,579
Haverhill	7,296	15.4	1,124
Pittsfield	6,433	12.9	830

Note: Adjusted enrollment is the number of students enrolled at any point in time during the school year. This is not equivalent to the district's October 1 enrollment as reported in enrollment reports on the DESE website. Number of students who transferred in or out was calculated based on churn rate and adjusted enrollment and, thus, is approximate.

12 For more information on the Gateway Cities, visit: www.massinc.org/programs/GatewayCities.aspx.

Within the Gateway City districts, school-level churn rates range from less than 5 in Worcester to over 50 in Brockton, Fitchburg and Haverhill. As shown in Table 5, some of the lowest churn rates are in schools serving students in grades K-8 and some of the highest churn rates are in high schools.

TABLE 5. Range of churn rates in Gateway City schools (2009–10)

DISTRICT	GRADE LEVEL	SCHOOL WITH THE LOWEST CHURN RATE	SCHOOL WITH THE HIGHEST CHURN RATE
Brockton	K-8	9.5	63.8
	9-12	15.9	80.0
Fitchburg	K-8	9.3	30.0
	9-12	21	86.1
Haverhill	K-8	6.5	34.6
	9-12	18.2	59.4
Holyoke	K-8	15.4	45.0
	9-12	20.5	31.1
Springfield	K-8	15.4	40.5
	9-12	16.2	37.3
Worcester	K-8	4.3	32.6
	9-12	2.8	25.4

For additional data on Gateway Cities and Gateway City districts, see Appendix C.

Interview Findings

A growing body of national research suggests that mobility has a negative impact on mobile students' academic achievement.[13] In Massachusetts, non-mobile students outperform mobile students on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assesment System (MCAS) tests—even among students with similar socioeconomic backgrounds.[14] In order for the Commonwealth to close its persistent achievement gap, it is essential to acknowledge and work to overcome the challenges faced by mobile students and the school and district staff who are charged with educating them. To this end, this study sought to gain a better understanding of the challenges associated with high rates of student mobility in Massachusetts public schools in order to identify promising strategies for overcoming them. This report is intended to highlight these challenges and focus attention on the changes needed in policy and practice at state and local levels to address them.

Study findings presented in this section are based on information collected through qualitative interviews with staff in a small sample of schools and districts (6 school districts and 11 schools) in the Gateway Cities (listed in Table 6). The findings are based on interviews with 11 district staff members including 5 superintendents/assistant superintendents, 13 principals/assistant principals, 11 teachers and 8 school staff members. (See Appendix B for a list of all study participants.)

Compared to statewide figures, most of the participating schools and districts have higher percentages of students who are not white, from low-income families, and whose first language is not English (see Appendix A, Table 9). Academically, most of the participating schools have MCAS performance that lags substantially behind the state average. Two of the participating schools, Dean Technical High and High School of Commerce, are among the state's 35 lowest performing schools. As shown in Table 6, participating schools have high churn rates (16 to 40), which, for larger schools like Brockton High and High School of Commerce, means approximately 600 or more students enter or leave during one academic year.

TABLE 6. Churn rates and number of students who transferred into or out of participating schools (2009–10)

DISTRICT	SCHOOL	ADJUSTED ENROLLMENT	CHURN RATE	# OF STUDENTS WHO TRANSFERRED IN OR OUT
Brockton	Arnone Elementary (K-5)	862	16.7	144
	Brockton High (9-12)	4,319	15.9	687
Fitchburg	McKay Campus (preK-4)	523	30.0	157
	Fitchburg High (9-12)	1,311	21.0	275
Haverhill	Haverhill High (9-12)	1,908	18.2	347
Holyoke	Peck Full-Service Community (K-8)	723	39.6	286
	Dean Technical High (9-12)	688	27.9	192
Springfield	Sumner Avenue (preK-5)	600	35.2	211
	High School of Commerce (9-12)	1,589	37.3	593
Worcester	Belmont Street Community (preK-6)	576	32.6	188
	Burncoat Senior High (9-12)	1,191	18.1	216

Note: Adjusted enrollment is the number of students enrolled at any point in time during the school year. This is not equivalent to the district's October 1 enrollment as reported in enrollment reports on the DESE website. Number of students who transferred in or out was calculated based on churn rate and adjusted enrollment and, thus, is approximate.

13 For a review of published research on academic and non-academic outcomes of student mobility, see: United States Government Accountability Office. (November 2010). *K-12 Education: Many Challenges Arise in Educating Students Who Change Schools Frequently,* GAO-11-40. See also: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (August 2010). *Education Research Brief: Student Mobility in Massachusetts.*

14 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (August 2010). *Education Research Brief: Student Mobility in Massachusetts.*

Study Participants' Knowledge of Causes of Mobility

Most schools and districts do not systematically collect and record information about why a student has transferred into or out of the school, or about where the student is moving to or from. In some cases, school and/or district staff members are made aware of the reason, and in other cases they are not. Based on their experiences with mobile students and their families, study participants were asked to describe the most common reasons students enter and leave school during the school year. Most indicated that low-income families in their schools and districts tend to move more frequently than other families and that many of the reasons why they move are socioeconomic. While moves occur for a variety of reasons, the most frequently mentioned reasons relate to housing instability, immigration, changes in employment and family instability.

Housing instability: Many school and district leaders described the communities where their schools are located as low-income neighborhoods. They report that many families live in rental units, Section 8 housing[15] and temporary housing such as homeless shelters or single-family homes where families "double-up" with other families. Poor housing quality, inability to pay rent, eviction, foreclosure, movement into or out of temporary housing and other housing issues are among the reasons students' families move.

Housing in the Gateway Cities

- **Moves:** Between 1995 and 2000 (most recent time period for which data are available), 46% of Gateway City residents and 52% of Boston residents moved compared to 36% of residents in the rest of the state.[16]
- **Rentals:** In Gateway Cities, 50% of households live in rental units compared to 35% of households statewide.[17]
- **Homelessness:** Massachusetts public schools enroll more than 50,000 homeless students.[18] Combined, the 11 Gateway Cities educate approximately 40% of them (20,000 homeless children).[19] Studies have shown that these students have the highest rates of movement into and out of schools.[20]

McKinney–Vento and Homeless Students

Reauthorized as part of the federal Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009, the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act protects the rights of homeless students to ensure they have access to an appropriate public school education. Under the law, all districts are required to assign a McKinney-Vento liaison. Liaisons assist with enrollment and connect homeless students to appropriate services. They also work to reach the many unidentified homeless students with unknown and unmet needs.

Reducing student mobility is one of the central goals of the McKinney-Vento Act. The law guarantees homeless students' enrollment in their school of choice. If this is their school of origin,[21] the Act entitles the student to transportation. The cost of providing this transportation is split evenly by the sending and receiving district. Federal McKinney-Vento funds are subgranted by the state to districts, but these resources are generally not available to defray transportation costs.

15 In 1974, Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act, which amended the U.S. Housing Act of 1937 to create the Section 8 Program. In the Section 8 Program, tenants pay about 30 percent of their income for rent, while the rest of the rent is paid with federal money.

16 U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, *State-to-State Migration Flows: 1995 to 2000* [Data file].

17 U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2008 *American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates,* Data Profile, Massachusetts.

18 Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2009). *Homelessness in Massachusetts Public Schools.*

19 Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development's quarterly shelter reports to the state legislature show 40 percent of children living in shelters come from Gateway Cities.

20 Studies have shown that homeless children have higher rates of movement into and out of schools than other children from low-income families. For example, see Ann Masten and others, "Children in Homeless Families: Risks to Mental Health and Development," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61(2) (1993). It is also important to note that while the federal McKinney-Vento Act (2002) sought to stabilize homeless children by guaranteeing transportation to their school of origin, students often choose to attend the school closest to their new housing arrangement.

21 School of origin is defined as the school the student attended when permanently housed or the school in which the student was last enrolled before moving. See: "The McKinney–Vento Act at a Glance" (National Center for Homeless Education and others, 2008).

Immigration: Newcomers to the United States account for some of the movement of students into schools. School and district staff explained that some immigrant families remain in the same community after they arrive, while others continue to move. For example, some immigrant families arrive in the United States without having secured housing, so they live with family or friends until they secure a residence of their own. For some immigrant students, it is common to make frequent trips back and forth to their home country for extended stays during the school year or over a period of several years. These extended stays account for some of the mobility in schools.

Changes in employment: School and district staff cited changes in employment as a common reason why students' families move. In some cases, a parent or guardian loses a job or has chronic joblessness, and in other cases a caregiver has secured a job in a different city and must move the family. Some students move away and return during the course of the school year because their parent or guardian is a migrant worker who moves within or outside the U.S. to pursue work.

Education, Income and Employment in the Gateway Cities[22]

- **High school diploma:** In Gateway Cities, the percent of residents over age 25 with a high school diploma is 77% compared to 88% statewide.
- **Bachelor's degree:** In Gateway Cities, the percent of residents over age 25 with a bachelor's degree is 20% compared to 38% statewide.
- **Median income:** The median household income is $43,379 in Gateway Cities compared to $64,864 statewide.
- **Percentage of families whose income is below the poverty level:** In Gateway Cities, 17% of families are below the poverty level compared to 7% statewide.
- **Unemployment:** Between 2006 and 2008, the average unemployment rate in Gateway Cities was 8.6% compared to 5.9% statewide. More recently (July 2011), the average unemployment rate in Gateway Cities was 11.5% compared to 7.8% statewide.[23]

Family instability: School and district staff described an array of family and personal issues that result in students changing residences and thus changing schools. Changes in parents' or guardians' marital status or changes in custody arrangements can lead to a temporary or permanent move. Sometimes students move because they or their family members are dealing with issues related to domestic violence, physical or mental health problems, substance abuse, arrests and incarceration.

While mentioned by some study participants, foster care placement, dissatisfaction with the school, school choice (for example leaving or returning from a private or charter school), and violating school or district policies were not frequently cited as common reasons for student mobility.

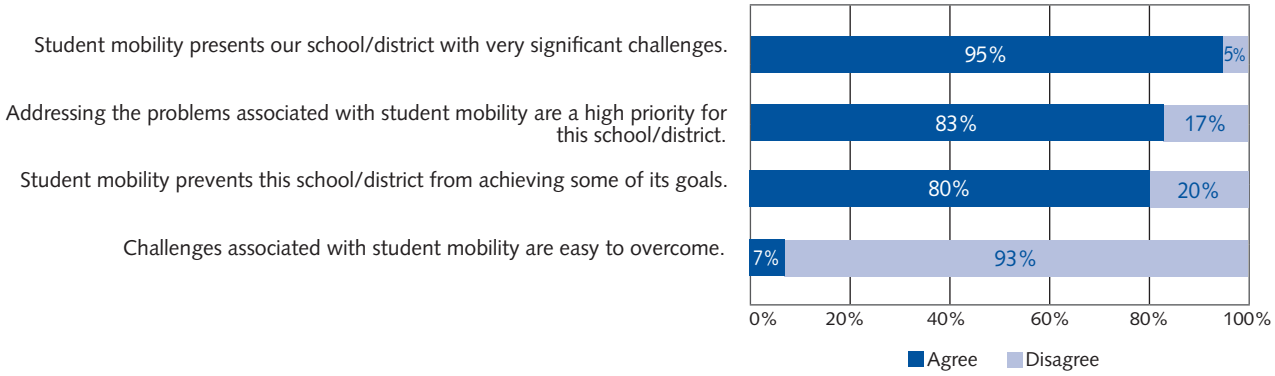
22 Information in this text box is from: U.S. Census Bureau, *2006–2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates,* Data Profile, Massachusetts.

23 Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. (2011). *Cities and towns by selected area* [Data file].

Challenges Faced by Schools and Districts

While some mobile students excel academically and socially and make a positive contribution to the school community, the study revealed that, overall, student mobility presents schools with challenges that are not easy to overcome (see Figure 3). School and district staff members know they cannot control the external factors that cause student mobility, so they work to overcome the difficulties associated with it in order to serve mobile students well. Interviews with staff in schools and districts with high mobility rates shed light on the challenges associated with student mobility and addressing the needs of mobile students. The most common challenges mentioned by study participants are described below.

FIGURE 3. Study participants' opinions about student mobility (n=43)



Students are behind academically. Mobile students tend to be behind academically and schools are faced with the challenge of "bringing them up to speed." While there are a variety of reasons why mobile students may be behind academically, three were most frequently mentioned by study participants. First, unaligned curriculum across and within districts creates gaps in learning when students move. Second, mobile students often have periods of time when they were not in school and, as a result, have gaps in their learning. For example, some students miss school when they or their families are experiencing a period of trauma. Some mobile students are frequently absent because they have responsibilities at home that keep them from school (such as caring for a sick relative, young sibling or their own child) or they come from families where absence from school is accepted.

> "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."
>
> –Adjustment Counselor

Third, movement to and from other countries sometimes results in students being behind academically. At the early elementary level, some five- and six-year-old students who move to the United States from other countries have not had any formal schooling. At the higher grade levels, students from other countries may not have been required to attend school after a certain grade level. For example, one high school principal noted that students who come to her school from Cape Verde often have not been in school for several years, since schooling in Cape Verde is mandatory only for students between the ages of 6 and 14. And, as mentioned above, for some immigrant students it is common to move between the United States and their home country during the course of a school year. During the time students are in their home country, they typically are not enrolled in school and return to the United States having missed several weeks or months of instruction.

Students arrive without their academic records, making placement decisions difficult. Students who transfer to a school during the school year often arrive without their academic records. School staff explained that there is frequently a lag time between the students' arrival and the arrival of their records. The lag time varies from a few days to a few months, and, in some cases, records never arrive. Staff time is required to contact the students' previous schools to obtain the records and make follow-up calls if the records do not arrive. An added challenge is that most records are in paper, not electronic, form, so they must be sent via the postal service or fax. It is also common for schools to receive incomplete records (for example,

> "Without student records, we are flying blind."
>
> –Teacher

missing transcripts, test results or discipline records), so schools do not have a complete picture of a student's academic, social and emotional needs when he/she arrives. This makes it difficult to place the student into an appropriate classroom and into special programs that match his/her needs.

Some school staff members stated that they "feel pressured" by state social service agencies to place incoming students into classes quickly, but they struggle to make sound placement decisions with incomplete or no records. This is particularly challenging at the middle and high school levels. School staff must carefully review a student's transcript, determine how the student's previous classes align with the classes offered at the school and, taking the student's grades into consideration, make class assignments. In some cases, even when records are complete, determining how to apply credit from a student's previous school is difficult.

When only a handful of new students arrive during a given school year, the problems associated with missing or incomplete academic records may be manageable. But, in schools where in-take rates are high, this lack of information presents a challenge. In some schools, the number of incoming students surpasses the number of days in the school year, so, while highly unlikely, it is conceivable that there could be at least one new student entering the school every single day of the year. For example, in 2009–10 the Peck Full-Service Community School had an in-take rate of 28%, which means approximately 201 new students enrolled during the school year. In a larger school like Brockton High, where the in-take rate was 9% in 2009–10, close to 400 new students enrolled throughout the course of the school year. (See Table 7.)

TABLE 7. In-take rates and number of students who transferred into the school (2009–10)

DISTRICT	SCHOOL	2009–10 IN-TAKE RATE	# OF STUDENTS WHO TRANSFERRED IN
Brockton	Arnone Elementary (K-5)	9.9	85
	Brockton High (9-12)	8.9	384
Fitchburg	McKay Campus (preK-4)	23.5	123
	Fitchburg High (9-12)	13.0	170
Haverhill	Haverhill High (9-12)	10.3	197
Holyoke	Peck Full-Service Community (K-8)	27.8	201
	Dean Technical High (9-12)	13.2	91
Springfield	Sumner Avenue (preK-5)	22.2	133
	High School Of Commerce (9-12)	15.9	253
Worcester	Belmont Street Community (preK-6)	17.9	103
	Burncoat Senior High (9-12)	9.1	108

Note: Number of students who transferred in was calculated based on in-take rate and adjusted enrollment and, thus, is approximate. Adjusted enrollment is the number of students enrolled at any point in time during the school year. This is not equivalent to the district's October 1 enrollment as reported in enrollment reports on the DESE website.

Adjusting to a new school is often accompanied by changes outside of school to which students are also trying to adapt. For any student, entering a new school can be daunting because there are a variety of factors that may be different from the student's previous learning environment, including course offerings, course schedules, academic and extra-curricular programs, teaching styles, expectations, rules, testing requirements and graduation requirements. Leaving friends and caring adults to attend a new school with no familiar faces can be frightening.

For some mobile students, entering a new school is just one of the many changes to which they are trying to adapt. Some immigrant students, for example, are sent to the United States alone to live with extended family they may not know well. They may be learning a new language, adjusting to a new living situation, learning new social customs and assimilat-

ing into a new community in addition to adapting to a new educational setting. In other cases, students may be attending a new school because of a traumatic incident at home, such as domestic violence or incarceration of a parent. These students may be coping with trauma and a new living situation in addition to adjusting to a new school.

As described earlier, many families move for socioeconomic reasons. Students who live in poverty may have inadequate living conditions, lack food or proper clothing, or be in need of dental or health care, which may add to or exacerbate the challenges associated with attending a new school. Some have behavioral and mental health issues, or are in other ways emotionally unprepared to do school work. It is a challenge for schools to integrate students with such a diverse and complex range of needs into their school community, and the challenge is exacerbated when schools do not have a complete picture of a student's academic, social and emotional needs when he/she arrives.

Schools and districts lack the staff capacity to serve mobile students well. In addition to describing the range of issues mobile students face, school and district staff talked about their limited capacity to serve students' needs. Principals recognize the importance of matching the skills of educators and support staff to the needs of the student body, but doing so can be a challenge.

Existing staff are often not equipped to handle the diverse and complex needs that mobile students present. Many schools do not have the amount or type of staff needed to fully meet students' needs. For example, many schools do not have academic specialists who can provide individualized support to new students who are several grade levels behind academically. Nor do they have licensed social workers who can work with students who have severe social or familial issues or can facilitate referrals to services in the community. Furthermore, school staff recognize that students' families are often in need; while many staff members do as much as they can, in general, schools do not have the staff capacity to work with families or refer them to community resources.

A second issue that impacts staff capacity is that there is an inflexible funding system that makes it difficult to serve the needs of a changing population of students. Schools receive funding based on prior year October 1 enrollment. Principals make decisions about class sizes, materials, staffing and additional supports based on these figures. But when actual enrollments are higher and/or the composition of the student body is different than the previous year (for example, more special education (SPED) students or English language learners (ELLs) in particular grade levels), additional resources are not available. When this occurs, school principals are faced with the challenge of reallocating existing resources.

One elementary school principal explained "If I have 100 more students than the year before, then we're short money and materials." She went on to explain how the situation is exacerbated when students enter throughout the year. "When students join after the school year has already begun, the staffing allocation doesn't change. Often times we get students who require SPED or ELL services, but there's no increase in staffing for them." The principal explained that there have been times when she used paraprofessionals to cover staffing needs or moved staff from one grade to another mid-year which, she points out, may adversely affect non-mobile students who have to adapt to a new teacher in the middle of the year.

An additional challenge described by both school and district leaders is the level of effort involved in having to constantly enroll and transfer students. In most schools, this is the responsibility of staff in the guidance department. The extra work involved with in-take, assessment and placement, often interferes with their ability to tend to other responsibilities.

Student mobility makes meeting accountability targets more difficult. Principals and teachers devise strategies for meeting accountability targets based on the achievement levels of the students who are enrolled in the school at the beginning of the school year. This often involves providing particular students or groups of students at certain grade levels with targeted supports. When students enter and leave throughout the year, those strategies no longer achieve the intended outcomes. For example, one principal explained that student mobility impacts her ability to execute her "game plan." She explained "I know I need to make a 3-point gain in ELA and math this year. So we've identified students who are on the cusp of going to the next level, so we can really target them with interventions. So I've got a game plan. And mid-year, I look at the

> "It's like trying to hit a moving target."
>
> – School Principal

students and, 40 of them are gone, and I have 60 new ones. So now I've got to re-invent and change my plan."

The current accountability system is viewed as flawed because it is a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Most school and district leaders described the expectation that mobile students will make the same amount of progress in the same amount of time as their non-mobile peers as unrealistic. The belief is that mobile students have the ability to make progress but due to their life circumstances and factors beyond the control of the school, they need more time and more support. This is a source of stress and frustration for school and district staff. Some questioned the fairness of comparing their school's or district's performance to schools or districts with less mobile student bodies.

> "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."
>
> – Superintendent

Challenges Faced in the Classroom

Eleven teachers identified by their principals as having particularly mobile classrooms were interviewed for this study. Teachers were asked to describe challenges associated with student mobility and the greatest difficulties in meeting the needs of mobile students in the classroom. Common themes among their responses are described below.

Students' non-academic needs impact relationship-building and student engagement. As described earlier, a new school is just one of the many changes to which mobile students are trying to adapt. Teachers explained that in addition to being behind academically, these students have a diverse and complex range of needs that can impact the teachers' ability to successfully integrate them into the classroom and engage them in class work. One teacher explained, "They have so many needs at so many different levels—it adds another layer of complexity to reaching and engaging these students." In particular, high school teachers mentioned how difficult it is to build relationships with mobile students who are distrusting, disillusioned or disengaged from school. Across grade levels, some teachers indicated that when they know a student's "story" or "situation" they must take it into consideration when making decisions in the classroom, such as "how hard to come down on a student" for not doing homework or how to discipline a student for misbehavior so as not to further disengage the student, while still maintaining high standards and expectations for them.

It takes time to bring students up to speed academically. As previously mentioned, mobile students are often behind academically, and classroom teachers are charged with closing gaps in students' knowledge. Teachers described the initial challenge of assessing a student's academic needs and devising a strategy for getting the student on track. Students who have significant gaps in their learning or gaps in literacy and English language skills require individualized attention. Teachers also explained that it takes time to get to know a new student, understand his/her learning style and strengths and weaknesses—all of which are necessary to effectively differentiate instruction.

Some teachers also talked about the need for more individual time with students. One teacher said she "takes it personally" when new students do not catch up quickly, and if she had more time to work with the students, she is confident they could make more progress.

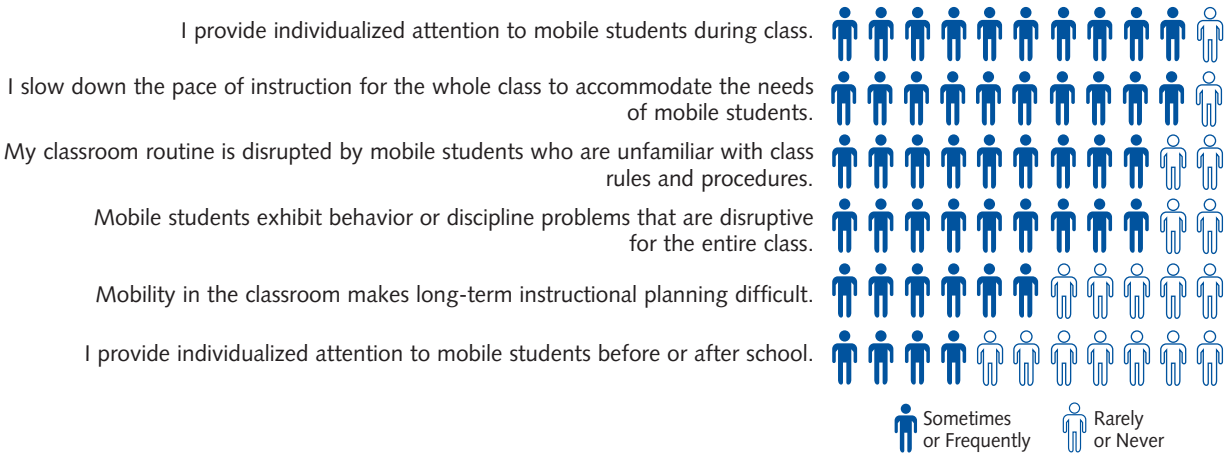
> "I'm always playing catch up. I also have to—at least once a week—block out a piece of time where the kids are doing something, so I can try to catch up another kid. And that's not fair to the other group."
>
> – High School Teacher

Many teachers indicated that they are "constantly playing catch up." Teachers described the disappointment and occasional frustration they feel when they put in a great deal of effort to work with a particular student, begin to see progress, and the student leaves the school. It is especially disheartening when a new student arrives and the teacher has to begin the process all over again.

Students require individualized attention during class. Most teachers indicated that in order for them to close students' gaps in knowledge, they must provide individualized attention to mobile students during class. It is less common for teachers to provide individual support before or after school (see Figure 4). Teachers who never or rarely provide individualized attention before or after school indicated that students are not available for extra help outside of regular school hours due to an inability to adjust their transportation schedule or commitments outside of school. As a result, teachers must find a way to provide mobile students with the individualized attention and academic support they need during class. It is most common for teachers to engage the class in a self-directed learning activity while they work one-on-one with new students.

Student mobility disrupts the flow of instruction and impacts the amount of material that can be taught. When new students transition into a classroom, the flow of instruction is interrupted and there is a loss of instruction time. In addition to providing individualized attention, teachers often adjust instruction for the whole class to accommodate the needs of a new student (see Figure 4). It is common for teachers to go over material that they have already taught and slow down their pace when teaching new material. In classrooms with substantial turnover during the course of the school year, teachers are faced with a group of students who represent a wide spectrum of proficiency levels, which also disrupts the flow and pacing of instruction and the amount of material that can be taught.

FIGURE 4. Teachers' opinions about student mobility (n=11)



Student mobility changes the classroom dynamic. In addition to adjusting academically, mobile students have to adjust to the social aspects of the classroom. Student mobility impacts what many teachers described as the "social dynamic" or "culture of the classroom." Teachers explained that when students are coming and going throughout the school year, it is difficult to build and maintain a sense of community in the classroom. Students who are new to the class are unfamiliar with classroom routines and expectations for behavior, which can impact classroom activities such as group work or self-directed activities and slow down transitions from one classroom activity to another. Several high school teachers noted that when new students arrive, there tends to be more "drama" in the classroom as students struggle to fit in and make friends. Teachers also explained that students who have moved because of a traumatic or otherwise difficult circumstance in life may be "emotional," "bitter" or "have a bad attitude," and a tendency to act out, which can be disruptive to the entire class. Some teachers described a period of adjustment. One teacher explained that there is an expectation that new students will fit in immediately, when in reality, this teacher finds that it usually takes about two months for a new student to get fully integrated into the classroom.

Impact of Mobility on Students

This study sought to understand the impact of mobility on students from the students' perspective—a point of view seldom explored by researchers. Student drawings were selected as the methodology because in comparison to other methods, they provide a way to collect valid and reliable information anonymously from full classrooms of students in a short amount of time (less than 15 minutes).[24]

At the conclusion of the teacher interviews, teachers were invited to have their students participate in the optional drawing exercise. Students in the class were asked to think about the times when a new student joins the class, or when a classmate leaves the class to go to another school. They were then asked to draw a picture of how the class changes and how it makes them feel. Drawings were collected from a total of 136 students from 7 classrooms. Despite the small sample of classrooms, the analysis of students' drawings provides some insights on how mobility may impact students. Key findings from the analysis are presented below.

During interviews, teachers were asked to describe the impact mobility has on students in their classrooms. As described below, findings from the analysis of students' drawings align with teachers' perceptions. Both teachers and students indicated that students are more likely to notice the social or emotional impact of student mobility rather than the academic impact.

The Teachers' Perspective

Elementary and middle school teachers indicated that when a student leaves, there is usually an emotional reaction among students in the class. Students are generally sad to see their classmates leave and when it is a close friend, young students are "heartbroken" and often cry. When a new student enters the classroom, students are often happy and enthusiastic because there is an opportunity to make a new friend. There is typically a social adjustment that impacts the dynamics of the classroom, as described in the previous section, but teachers believe that most younger students do not notice the impact mobility has on classroom functioning or on their learning.

High school teachers indicated that students are generally "not fazed" when a student enters or leaves the classroom because it is something to which they have grown accustomed. In fact, many high school teachers said student mobility is becoming part of the culture of their school. They indicated that some high school students notice the disruption mobility has on teaching and learning, but that, for most, the most noticeable impact is social rather than academic.

The Students' Perspective

Some students depicted a new student joining the class (n=29, 21%), some depicted a student leaving the class (n=29, 21%), and some students depicted both joining and leaving (n=52, 38%). In others, it was not clear whether the response depicted the classroom when a student leaves or joins (n=26, 19%). See Drawing 1 in Appendix D for an example.

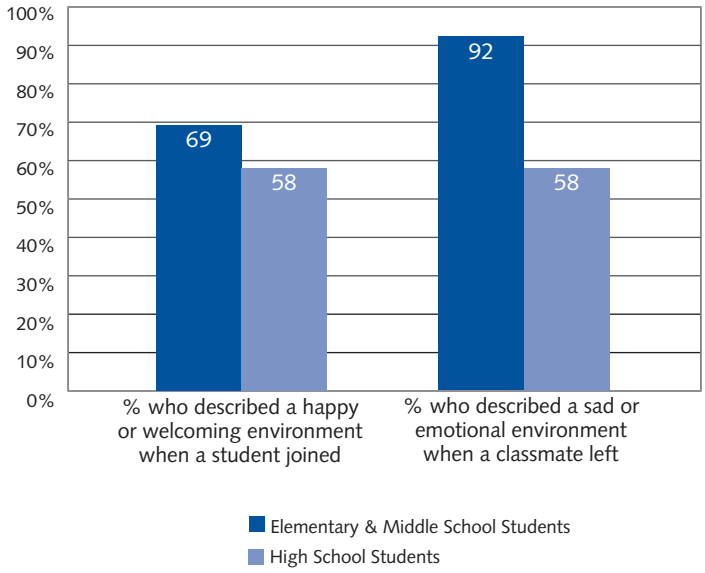
Regardless of whether a new student joins or a classmate leaves, mainly high school students described changes in the classroom. Of students who drew a new student joining, only 4% of elementary/middle students described changes in the classroom, while 31% of high school students described changes in the classroom. Some of these responses included the words "don't focus as much," "hard for teacher to stay focused on other kids" and "catch up." Twenty-two percent of high school students depicted social changes in the classroom when a new student joins, and 11% depicted teacher or instructional changes. High school students appeared more conscious of the changed social dynamic, with their responses including words such as "we don't know them" or "we might be quiet until we know them better." Conversely, no elementary/middle school students described social changes when a new student joins, and only 2% described teacher or instructional changes.

24 For over a decade, researchers have used student drawings of their teachers, classrooms, and learning experiences as a way to examine educational life in schools and have found that drawings yield reliable and valid information. Haney, Russell & Bebel document a decade of work in this area in their article: Drawing on Education: Using Drawings to Document Schooling and Support Change. (2004). *Harvard Educational Review,* 74(3), 241-272.

New Students Join the Classroom

The findings in this section are based on the responses from 81 students who depicted a new student joining their classroom. A happy or welcoming environment when a new student joins was depicted by 69% of elementary/middle school students and 58% of high school students (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. Type of environment depicted in student drawings



Nearly two-thirds of students (64%) described an environment that was happy or welcoming when a new student joined their classroom or school. Their drawings showed smiling faces, hearts, or students holding hands, and responses included the words "welcome," "comfortable" and the names of students who had joined the class. About one-third of responses showed a happy or welcoming environment with the words "new friends," "show them around" or "plays with me." However, more elementary/middle school students drew about new friends (40%) than high school students (14%) in drawings depicting a new student joining the classroom. (For an example, see Drawing 2 in Appendix D.)

Some students described an unhappy or unwelcoming environment when a new student joins their classroom. Of the drawings that showed a new student joining, 20% of elementary/middle school students and 28% of high school students described an unhappy or unwelcoming environment. An unhappy or unwelcoming environment was shown by drawing a student standing in a room where there are no empty desks, teasing a new student, or by writing words such as "weird," "they come to the door and are sad" or "don't know what kind of attitude they'll have," for example.

A few students' responses appeared to show empathy for a new student coming into the classroom. Among students who drew a new student joining, 16% of elementary/middle school students' and 11% of high school students' drawings seemed to show empathy for a new student. For example, some drawings showed two students and a thought bubble with the words "I am shy" or a student telling another student "do not be scared." Written responses showing empathy for new students included the words "nervous," "sick" or "hard to make friends."

Few students identified themselves as mobile (5%), but the majority of those who did described an unhappy or unwelcoming environment when joining a new classroom. Of the students who identified as mobile, only 14% described a happy or welcoming environment when they joined a new classroom and 86% described an unhappy environment. For example, these drawings showed a student looking sad, sick, standing with the teacher, or the words "shy," "embarrassed" or "no one will like me." (For an example, see Drawing 3 in Appendix D.)

Classmates Leave the Classroom

The findings in this section are based on the responses from 81 students who depicted a classmate leaving. Among the students who drew a classmate leaving, 92% of elementary/middle school students and 58% of high school students showed a sad or emotional environment (see Figure 5).

The vast majority of students (84%) depicted a sad or emotional classroom environment when a student leaves the class. These pictures showed students with frowning faces waving goodbye and the names of students who had left. A greater proportion of elementary/middle school students' drawings described a sad environment due to the loss of friends (65%) than high school students (26%). These responses included words such as "I miss [name]," "best friend" or "hard to make new friends," again showing a sense of empathy for a mobile student. One-quarter of elementary/middle school students portrayed extreme emotions when a student leaves, such as tears, crying, broken hearts or the word "painful." All of the students who drew or wrote about extreme emotions were in elementary or middle school. (For an example, see Drawing 4 in Appendix D.)

Of the students whose drawings showed a student leaving their class, 7% of elementary/middle school students and 42% of high school students described changes in the classroom. In these drawings, some students showed social changes in the classroom when a student leaves, such as boredom or the words "quiet" and "less fun." Similar to when a student joins a classroom, more high school students (32%) than elementary/middle school students (3%) described social changes when a student leaves. At the high school level, these responses included smiling faces and a student walking out the door, or the words "it's better now" and "he was weird." Very few elementary/middle school students' (2%) and high school students' (5%) drawings included changes in teaching and instruction when a classmate leaves. These responses included the words "more focused" and "hard for teacher to send scores."

Overcoming the Challenges

School and district leaders were asked what kind of assistance and resources their schools and districts need in order to overcome some of the challenges associated with student mobility. They expressed the need for: improvements in the in-take, assessment and placement process; a mechanism for obtaining and sharing promising practices; teacher professional development; a more flexible funding system; an accountability system that takes student mobility into consideration; and additional support staff and student services. Each of these is summarized below.

Improve in-take, assessment and placement process. When a mobile student enters a new school, it is common for the school to receive incomplete records or no records at all, making it difficult to place the student into a classroom and into special programs that match his/her needs. As a result, school leaders indicated that there is a need to improve the in-take, assessment and placement process. Specific suggestions for improvement through school-, district- and state-level solutions include: a dedicated staff person at the school whose sole responsibility is to facilitate the process and provide ongoing support for mobile students as they transition into the school; a district program that involves screening and assessing new students' academic, social and emotional needs before students are integrated into a school; and creating a statewide electronic records transfer system that would expedite records transfer as well as increase the transparency of records. Transparency of records is particularly critical for disciplinary records, which are often excluded when paper records are transferred.

A mechanism for obtaining and sharing promising practices. School and district leaders expressed the need for information about promising practices on how to address some of the difficulties associated with student mobility. As one superintendent said, "I don't want to have to reinvent the wheel." Some indicated the need for a clearinghouse of information while others expressed the desire for a forum for schools and districts who serve highly mobile student bodies to share ideas about what works and brainstorm potential solutions. One principal suggested convening a statewide conference to share best practices a few times a year.

Teacher professional development. Principals indicated that there is a need for additional professional development for teachers who have high turnover in their classrooms. Some indicated that there is a need for training on effective instructional strategies for meeting the needs of highly mobile students (e.g., differentiated instruction) while others focused on the need for training on classroom management, discipline, sensitivity training about homelessness and other social or familial issues, and effectively dealing with students who have social or emotional problems.

A flexible funding system. As mentioned earlier, school and district leaders explained that the state's funding system makes it difficult to serve the needs of a changing student body. School budgets are based on prior enrollments; however, those figures often do not match actual enrollments. Thus, school and district leaders would like to see the funding system modified so there is a mechanism that allows schools to receive additional funding when the size and composition of the student body changes during the school year.

Some study participants suggested that rather than determining the budget for the year, budgets should be examined and adjusted throughout the course of the school year based on actual enrollment and characteristics of the student body. This would allow schools the flexibility to adjust staffing and resources as needed.

Others went a step further, arguing that it costs more to educate mobile students and would like to see the funding formula adjusted to account for this. One district staff member believes the funding system creates a disincentive to serve mobile students. He explained that mobile students are often high-need and require more services; thus, more money is required to serve them well. Since the funding system does not provide a way to get the extra money needed to serve them well, there is no incentive for districts to do so. He advocates for creating incentives for schools and districts to serve mobile students well.

An accountability system that takes student mobility into consideration. School and district leaders expressed the desire for state and federal policymakers and education leaders to have a greater awareness of the challenges that schools and districts with highly mobile student populations face. And, there is a belief among many that student mobility should be taken into consideration in state and federal accountability systems. Leaders were clear to point out that they *do* want to be held to high standards and accountable for serving all students well. But, they believe the current "one-size-fits-all" accountability system is flawed. They believe it is unrealistic to expect schools with high student turnover to achieve at the same levels and progress in the same amount of time as schools with less mobile student bodies. They would like to see the fact that they are serving a constantly changing, high-need student body reflected in some way in both state and federal accountability systems.

One superintendent explained: "There really is no differentiation on the part of higher powers that the child who is running the race with a 60-pound backpack may take longer and struggle more to get to the finish line than the child who is wearing the new Nike sneakers and the latest running outfit. It's not a reflection on the capabilities of either of those students. It's not about ability, it's about opportunity." Another superintendent believes it is important to be able to examine the performance of mobile students and non-mobile students separately in order to truly understand how well a school is performing. This superintendent indicated that student mobility is sometimes used as an excuse for poor performance. "We tend to use it as one of our excuses, 'We could be better if we had a more stable environment.' There's some level of concern about churn rates, but when you only have 30% of students meeting proficiency on MCAS, it's no longer about mobility. When you look at a stability rate of 75%, you would think then that at least 75% of students would be successful. We need to dispel those myths."

Additional support staff and student services. School and district staff described a range of academic, social and emotional issues mobile students present and their limited capacity to serve these needs. Additional support staff was a commonly cited need. And, because there are many factors outside the control of the school, wraparound services and supports outside the school system are also needed. The types of support staff and additional services mentioned by study participants are listed below.

Support Staff

- **New student coordinator.** To address the challenges associated with in-take, assessment and placement, principals expressed interest in having a dedicated staff person at the school whose sole responsibility is to facilitate the process and provide ongoing support for mobile students as they transition into the classroom. Of particular importance would be the ability to have in-depth conversations with incoming students and their families to identify students' needs, obtain information about their life situation, and use that information to coordinate both in-school and outside-of-school supports. Some principals mentioned that a trained, licensed social worker would be an ideal candidate for the position.
- **Academic specialists.** A key finding of this study is that mobile students are often behind academically and the strategies teachers employ to address their needs may adversely impact non-mobile students in the class. A solution offered by study participants is to hire additional academic specialists, such as literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) specialists, to provide the individual support students need in order to get back on track. Additional adults in the classroom would reduce some of the challenges and negative consequences of high student mobility that were described in the previous section of this report.
- **Staff who work with students who have social, emotional and behavioral needs.** Given the diverse and complex issues that many mobile students face, there is a need for staff members who can provide support and guidance to high-need students. Some principals expressed the need for additional adjustment and guidance counselors while others indicated the need for licensed social workers. Some principals discussed the need for a Department of Children and Families (DCF) liaison to be in the school full-time to improve coordination of services for students and their families.

- **Family liaison.** For a range of reasons, schools appear to have greater difficulty effectively engaging the families of mobile students than those of stable students. Schools recognize the importance of family engagement in a child's education but are often limited in their capacity to reach out to and actively engage parents or guardians. School and district leaders also recognize that families new to the community may not know how to navigate the education system or understand what resources are available to them in the community. Many school and district leaders indicated that they would like to have someone in the role of family liaison to improve outreach to families, engage families in the school community, and connect families to community resources.

Services

- **School-based services for students.** Several study participants suggested increasing school-based services for students including a full-service health clinic, daycare for students who have children, a learning center to assist with remediation and academic support, and access to technology and quiet study spaces outside regular school hours. Several study participants suggested creating a program designed to transition new students into the school community that includes accelerated academic support to close gaps in students' knowledge. Some also suggested expanding programs that can engage and connect new students to their schools, including increasing the number of clubs, sports teams and other activities that build a sense of community in the school.
- **School-based services and resources for families.** Several study participants suggested increasing school-based services and resources for families as a way to engage them in the school community as well as provide services and supports that they need. Suggestions included adult ESL classes, General Equivalency Dipolma (GED) classes, parenting classes, support groups and a food pantry. School and district leaders believe that if they could do more to assist families it would encourage them to stay in the community and help maintain consistency for their children.
- **Improve access to and use of community partners.** Some of the needs mobile students have are outside the scope of what schools can address, so school and district leaders often establish community partnerships to meet these needs. Recent budget cuts have resulted in the elimination of staff positions responsible for facilitating partnerships thus impacting some schools' capacity to partner effectively. Several school and district leaders indicated that there is a need for better coordinated efforts among the social services agencies, state agencies and school districts.
- **Transportation for students who live outside the attendance zone.** In an attempt to reduce student mobility, some school districts allow students to remain at their school if their family moves outside the attendance zone. For students whose families are able to transport them to and from school, the policy works well; however, lack of transportation results in many students having to switch schools despite the flexible policy. This is particularly true for elementary school students who are too young to walk to school alone, take public transportation alone, or walk a long distance or through potentially unsafe neighborhoods.
- **Assistance with data analysis.** Some district staff indicated that their districts do not have the capacity or time to engage in the fine-grained data analysis that is necessary to fully understand mobility in the district and the characteristics of the students most impacted. Several expressed the need for extra support from the state and the need to create a "data dashboard," which is a collection of relevant metrics on student achievement and engagement that can be viewed on a single computer screen to enable monitoring of key indicators over time.

An existing model that provides many of the supports study participants indicated would be helpful in better meeting the needs of mobile students is the Full-Service Community School Model. As described in the text box on the next page, full-service community schools are designed to address multiple factors that impact student achievement by locating academic, social, emotional and health support services in schools. One such school, Peck Full-Service Community School in Holyoke, participated in this study. In the text box on page 22, Peck's model is described, followed by a description of other supports school staff believe are needed to better serve mobile students.

Full-Service Community Schools

Full-service community schools are designed to address multiple factors that impact student achievement by locating academic, social, emotional and health support services where children are—schools. Recently these schools have gained greater currency as a response to the persistent gaps in academic achievement between low-income and all other students. These gaps are due, in part, to unequal access to opportunities and services that lead to disparities in students' school readiness and performance. Full-service community schools require cross-agency collaboration and coordinated funding streams to ensure that community service providers work directly with schools through sustained partnerships.

The Peck Full-Service Community School in Holyoke began its pilot year as a full-service community school in 2009 as part of a school improvement plan to address the needs of a student body where 95% are low-income and 20% are homeless at some point during the school year. According to Peck Principal Paul Hyry-Dermith, "for us, being a full-service community school means acknowledging that the people who are employees of the school cannot provide all the opportunities, services, and programs that our kids and families want and need to meet their goals and aspirations. We need to look for help from partners outside of the school, including local organizations, colleges and universities, and families themselves." Peck's model has three overarching goals:

1. Strengthen and improve academic performance through classroom and supplemental educational support.
2. Improve family engagement and leadership at the school.
3. Provide families access to resources and services that support their children's education.

As part of its full-service model, Peck hosts a school-based health center on site that provides medical and dental health services and mental health supports for students and their families. The school also has two family case managers on staff who provide comprehensive services for families in crisis and a coordinated referral system for families in need. Peck has also expanded before- and after-school programming to provide needed academic enrichment and youth development opportunities for students. In addition, Peck has a family welcoming and engagement initiative designed to get more families involved in the school community. According to Case Manager Yaldira Felix Brown, engaging families through services provides opportunities to build relationships, educate caregivers and, potentially, reduce mobility.

The Full-Service Community School Model is central to the school's improvement plan to more effectively address the needs of all its students. However, the model does not address what school staff believe are critical elements of an effective intervention for mobile students, including better timed placements, pre-placement assessments and academic remediation. As Principal Hyry-Dermith observed, while the school has developed a set of targeted interventions for English language learners (ELLs), they do not have a similar set of academic interventions specifically for mobile students. It is too early to tell if the full-service model is effective in better meeting the needs of mobile students at the school.

Potential Solutions

Potential solutions for overcoming the challenges associated with student mobility are described in this section. The strategies described below were drawn from a review of recent research and literature on school, district and state education policies designed to address challenges associated with student mobility. Some of these strategies are in place in schools and districts that participated in this study.

School-level Strategies

Increase student engagement. Upon entering a new school, it may be difficult for a student to engage in the school community and develop relationships with his/her classmates. A few no-cost strategies for increasing student engagement that are often mentioned in the literature include:

- Assign each new student a "buddy," student guide or ambassador to assist the new student in negotiating the school during his/her first several weeks.[25]
- Sponsor schoolwide "acquaintanceship" contests or activities designed to encourage the student body to get to know students they might not otherwise meet.
- Encourage students to join a school club or participate in other extracurricular activities. By participating in these activities, a new student will begin to make friends based on shared interests and also may begin to feel more connected to the school. It is important to have a procedure in place for students who may not be able to participate in extracurricular activities due to lack of transportation, costs associated with participation, or appropriate clothing.[26]

Implement tutoring programs. To ensure mobile students' academic improvement, particular weaknesses or gaps in a student's knowledge could be identified and addressed through individual tutoring or some other form of academic support that occurs in addition to classroom instruction. Several research studies found that participation in a biweekly tutoring program improved new students' grades and achievement tests scores.[27] If tutoring is offered before or after school, it is important to consider ways to help students overcome any barriers to participating (e.g., transportation).

Increase family engagement. Some researchers have found that a substantial proportion of moves are related to student and parent/guardian dissatisfaction with the school. They have also found that the amount of effort parents/guardians expend to keep their child in the same school is closely connected to the quality of the relationship parents/guardians have with the school.[28] Developing personal relationships with families and engaging them in the school community may create incentives for families to resolve conflicts that may arise and allow students to remain at that school.[29]

Establishing strong relationships with families can also enable the school to obtain valuable information that can be used to better serve the students.[30] Strategies for engaging families include:

- Create an orientation or "welcome" video in the dominant languages of the school. Consider including a virtual tour of the school and brief introductions of key school staff members.[31]
- Create a "welcoming committee" or "parent outreach committee" (that includes an administrator, school counselor,

25 Stover, D. (2000). The mobility mess of students who move. *The Education Digest,* 66(3), 61-64.

26 Popp, P., Stronge, J., & Hindman, J. (2003). *Students on the move: Reaching and teaching highly mobile children and youth.* (Urban Diversity Series Report No. 116). Greensboro, N.C.: National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE and ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED482661).

27 Jason, L.A., et al. *Helping Transfer Students: Strategies for Educational and Social Readjustment.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992.

28 Kerbow, D., Azcoitia, C., & Buell, B. (2003). Student mobility and local school improvement in Chicago. *The Journal of Negro Education,* 72(1), 158-164.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Smith, J. L. M., Fien, H., & Paine, S. C. (2008). When mobility disrupts learning: Using proactive strategies, schools can reduce the adverse academic effects of student mobility. *Educational Leadership,* 59-63.

31 Morse, S. C. (1997). *Unschooled migrant youth: Characteristics and strategies to serve them* . EDO-RC-97-2 (Washington, DC: Office for Educational Research and Improvement).

member of the office staff, teacher and several parents) whose members are charged with family outreach and engagement.[32]

- Provide parents with resources to support their child's learning, such as information on ways to help students with homework.

Establish procedures that make transitioning new students less disruptive. A constant influx of new students can be disruptive for staff and students. Procedures that may make the transition less disruptive include:

- Require students to complete an "interest survey" or "personal information survey" that will help the teacher get to know the student and provide him/her with other useful information about the student.[33]
- Assign new students to a short-term "transition" or "welcome" classroom to assess their needs, acclimate them to the school and begin providing services.[34]
- Assign an independent study to students who arrive very late in the year rather than placing them in a classroom.[35]

An existing instructional model that has the potential to addresses some of the challenges associated with student mobility described in the previous section is competency-based education. The text box below describes the model as a potential strategy for better meeting the needs of mobile students.

Competency-Based Education

Competency-based education (sometimes referred to as outcomes-based, performance-based or proficiency-based) is a contemporary instructional model that allows students to work at their own pace and advance after they have mastered necessary content and skills. Key elements of the approach are described below:

- **Students work at levels that are appropriately challenging and advance only upon mastery.** The core element of a competency-based approach is that students work at their own pace and progress to more advanced work upon demonstration of mastery. Academic placement and advancement decisions are not based on a student's age or the amount of time he/she spent studying specific content (sometimes referred to as "seat time") In this model it is possible, for example, for an eleven-year-old student to work on 5th grade math and 9th grade English language arts (ELA). It is also possible for some students to complete courses more quickly than others because students who do not demonstrate mastery do not advance.
- **There are explicit and measurable learning objectives in an environment where students take responsibility for their own learning.** In competency-based models, courses are organized into measurable learning objectives. The learning objectives are shared with students who are, in turn, encouraged to take responsibility for mastering them. In the classroom, teachers act as facilitators and coaches of learning rather than simply delivering content. Mastering individual learning objectives provides students with a sense of progress and accomplishment.
- **Assessment is a positive learning experience for students.** In a competency-based model, there is a strong emphasis on formative assessments that are aligned with learning objectives. When assessment occurs, students receive immediate feedback and are encouraged to return to difficult concepts and skills until they achieve mastery. Furthermore, the focus is on student learning, not grades. In competency-based approaches, student progress is often categorized in three levels: 1) mastery or high performance; 2) proficient; and 3) novice or still working toward proficiency. Grades may still be used to rank progress toward proficiency but students only progress when they have demonstrated A or B work.

Continued on next page.

32 Popp, P., Stronge, J., & Hindman, J. (2003). *Students on the move: Reaching and teaching highly mobile children and youth.* (Urban Diversity Series Report No. 116). Greensboro, N.C.: National Center for Homeless Education at SERVE and ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED482661).

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

35 Rumberger, R., Larson, K., Ream, R., & Palardy, G. (1999). *The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools.* Report prepared for Policy Analysis for California Education, PACE, Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley & Stanford University.

Competency-Based Education, *continued*

The competency-based model is a potential strategy for alleviating some of the challenges associated with student mobility (described in the previous section of this report) and for better meeting the needs of mobile students. In a competency-based model, instruction is centered on individual students' academic needs, thus accommodating students who are several grade levels behind in some content areas and on grade level in others. The approach also may alleviate some of the disruption that occurs in a traditional classroom when a new student enters mid-semester. In addition, the competency-based approach provides students who change schools in the middle of the semester with the opportunity to gain credit for the learning objectives they have mastered even though they have not completed the course, while also providing staff at the new school with information about the objectives the student has not yet mastered.

It is important to note that the competency-based model is an emerging model with limited documentation and evidence of effectiveness. A scan of the field conducted by researchers at the International Association for Online Learning found a limited number of schools that have fully developed competency-based models.[36] While there are some early adopters of the approach (such as Diploma Plus, Chugah Alaska School District, and Florida Virtual School), there is a dearth of formal documentation, research and evaluation on competency-based approaches.

District-level Strategies

Conduct immediate and comprehensive screening. Literature on student mobility stresses the importance of evaluating new students' abilities as soon as possible.[37] Administering short assessments in key content areas can provide information that can be used to place students into classes and is particularly useful when students arrive without academic records.[38] As part of the screening process, consider asking the student to write an essay on something of interest to him/her. The essay could serve a dual purpose: 1) An assessment of the student's language and writing skills, and 2) Information that could be used to match the student with a buddy, place the student in a club or extra-curricular activity and/or help the teacher get to know the student.

A program that operated from 2004 to 2009 in Holyoke Public Schools entitled the Transient Opportunity Program (TOP) placed middle- and elementary-school students who entered the district during the school year into a transitional program where their academic, social and emotional needs were assessed and supports were provided prior to placing the students in a classroom. TOP is described in more detail in the text box on the following page.

Professional development for teachers. Research has shown that teachers often do not have training on how to effectively work with students who transfer into their classrooms during the course of the school year.[39] One study, for example, found that teachers are trained to develop their instructional plans based on a classroom of students who will remain with them for an entire year. Their training did not include strategies for assessing and meeting the needs of students who enter throughout the year or how to provide adequate instruction to stable students in a highly mobile classroom.[40]

36 Sturgis, C. & Patrick, S. (November, 2010). *When Success Is the Only Option: Designing Competency-Based Pathways for Next Generation Learning*. International Association for Online Learning (iNACOL).

37 Smith, J.L.; Fien, H.; & Paine, S.C. (2008). When mobility disrupts learning. *Educational Leadership,* 59-63.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Lash, A. & Kirkpatrick, S. (1990). A classroom perspective on student mobility. *The Elementary School Journal,* 91 (2), 176-191..

40 *ibid;* Gruman, D. H., Harachi, T. W., Abbott, R. D., Caralano, R. F., & Fleming, C.B. (Nov/Dec 2008). Longitudinal effects of student mobility on three dimensions of elementary school engagement. *Child Development,* 79(6), 1833-1852.

"Transient Opportunity Program"—Holyoke Public Schools

In 2004, the Holyoke Public School District implemented the Transient Opportunity Program (TOP) as part of its turn-around strategy to better address the needs of its highly mobile students and their families. TOP placed elementary- and middle-school students who entered the district after October 1st into a transitional program where their academic, social and emotional needs were assessed and supports were provided, prior to their placement in a general classroom. The program also sought to address the challenges teachers face in integrating new students mid-term when they often have limited understanding of where those student are academically and socially.

School and district leaders in Holyoke believe that TOP is a promising model for schools with a highly mobile student body. Peck Principal Paul Hyry-Dermith stated, "the program really prepared the classroom teacher for getting the new student in a much better way than what typically happens in transient schools." For 7th grade ELA teacher Katie Silva Moran, the program ensured that mobile students did not enter her classroom mid-lesson, and those who may be at the school for only a few weeks would never enter her class, which allowed a more stable learning community for her students.

Holyoke's experience with TOP revealed a number of promising practices for schools serving high-need mobile students:

- Create academic, social and emotional profiles of new students that can be used to improve the process of integrating them into the classroom.
- Provide academic supports designed to get mobile students caught up quickly.
- Develop thoughtful and flexible placement protocols that address the needs of students and teachers.
- Engage mobile students in the school community.
- Engage families, assess their needs, and refer them to appropriate community services.

In the early stages of the TOP program, an external evaluation was conducted. This initial evaluation found no evidence of improved performance among program participants.[41] The evaluators identified a number of issues with how the program was structured and implemented during its pilot year including inadequate student assessments, poor placement protocols, and insufficient staffing.[42] Many of these issues were addressed in subsequent years.

After a number of years as a district-wide program, TOP was scaled back to be a school-based program housed at the Peck Full Service Community School. In November of 2009, state funding for the program ended and TOP was discontinued. When interviewed for this study, Holyoke Superintendent David Dupont expressed an interest in identifying new sources of funding to re-create the Transiency Opportunity Program.

41 Education Alliance at Brown University. (2005). *Holyoke Public Schools' Transient Opportunity Program Interim Evaluation Report.*
42 *Ibid.*

Understand patterns of mobility. If district staff members understand patterns of mobility in their districts, they may be better able to identify solutions. For example, an analysis of mobility in Chelsea Public Schools revealed that there is a cluster of urban communities from which and to which high percentages of students enter and exit.[43] The cluster included districts closest to Chelsea geographically and socioeconomically. If districts are able to identify clusters of districts with which they exchange students, as was the case in Chelsea, the districts involved could collaborate on strategies that would help mitigate the negative impact of student mobility. A similar study conducted in Chicago Public Schools found that mobility was largely between schools within the district that were a short distance apart.[44] Based on this type of finding, it may be prudent for a district to allow students to remain in their original school, even if they change their residence, or as described below, standardize the curriculum and pacing across all schools in the districts.

Standardize the curriculum, programs and policies. In some districts, a substantial portion of the mobility occurs between schools within the district. Standardizing curriculum, instructional programs and assessments as well as having common expectations among all schools would make placement decisions easier for school staff and provide consistency for students who transfer within the district.[45] Among the limitations of this approach cited in the literature is that recent reform efforts are based on schools taking on more autonomy to respond to the communities they serve, and a standardized curriculum, programs and policies would stand in conflict to this.[46] On the other hand, the adoption of the Common Core and the associated assessment system may result in more uniform curricula and pacing.

State Strategies

Establish a statewide electronic record-keeping system that facilitates rapid exchange of student records. The ability to electronically transfer the contents of a student's transcript and other related information (e.g., disciplinary records) that should be forwarded when a student moves to another school would address one of the key challenges identified in this study. At least two states, Florida and Texas, have systems in place that facilitate rapid, direct electronic exchange of student records.

Interagency collaboration to address the root causes of student mobility. Collaboration among state agencies is required to address the root causes of student mobility. Literature on student mobility suggests that a first step is for state education agencies to build awareness of the educational impact of student mobility among leaders in the state housing and human services agencies. State education agencies are also encouraged to collect and analyze information about the causes of student mobility and collaborate with appropriate state agencies to address the root problems, such as lack of affordable housing, high utility costs and unsafe neighborhoods.[47]

Build awareness about the consequences of mobility. The literature suggests that educating parents about the consequences of switching schools is one way to potentially reduce student mobility. Strategies include creating brochures and other materials that describe the potential damage switching schools can have on children and strategies for reducing the impact in the event the family does move. These include: planning to move during the summer, at the end of a marking period or semester; talking to teachers and principals at the child's old and new schools in order to help ease the transition; and, paying extra attention to the child's schoolwork during the move. As part of Chicago's "Staying Put" Campaign to increase awareness about the effects of mobility, an "If You Move…" brochure was created and widely disseminated to inform the community of the possible consequences of transferring schools, and a "Don't Leave School Without It" brochure was given to parents to ensure a smooth transfer from one school to the next.[48]

43 Bourque, M. (2008). *The impact of student mobility on urban school districts.* Dissertation. Boston University School of Education.

44 Kerbow, D. (1996). Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform. *Journal of Education For Students Placed At Risk,* 1(2), 147-169.

45 Smith, J.L.; Fien, H.; & Paine, S.C. (2008). When mobility disrupts learning. *Educational Leadership,* 59-63; Kerbow, D., Azcoitia, C., & Buell, B. (2003). Student mobility and local school improvement in Chicago. *The Journal of Negro Education,* 72(1), 158-164.

46 Kerbow, D., Azcoitia, C., & Buell, B. (2003). Student mobility and local school improvement in Chicago. *The Journal of Negro Education,* 72(1), 158-164.

47 Rumberger, R., Larson, K., Ream, R., & Palardy, G. (1999). *The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools.* Report prepared for Policy Analysis for California Education, PACE, Berkeley, CA: University of California, Berkeley & Stanford University.

48 Kerbow, D. (2003). Student mobility and local school improvement in Chicago. *Journal of Negro Education,* 72(1), 158-164.

Lessons Learned from Department of Defense Schools[49]

The United States Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) school system serves approximately 100,000 students in schools located in the United States and overseas, and about 40% are minority students. DoDEA schools experience high rates of student mobility because military personnel typically spend three years at one military post before being reassigned to another. On average, in these schools, about 37% of students enter and leave each year. Despite high turnover, students attending some DoDEA schools have achieved at high levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and writing tests—both in aggregate and in the Black and Hispanic subgroups. While no causal claims can be made, research on DoDEA schools has sought to shed light on some of the factors that might contribute to these outcomes.

While there are some important differences between communities in which DoDEA schools are located and other schools that experience high mobility, it is worthwhile to explore whether some of their practices could be effective in mitigating the negative effects of student mobility in traditional schools that experience high rates of student mobility:

- **Sufficient staffing.** There are full-time registration and records clerks who are responsible for the efficient transfer of records, and there is a guidance counselor who is responsible for conducting orientations and assigning new students a peer in the same grade level as part of a buddy system.
- **Individual attention.** When school records do not arrive with new students, staff members conduct an informal assessment using a standard set of questions about previous coursework. A computer-based assessment tool is used to assess students' reading and math skills within 48 hours of their arrival in the school.
- **Expectation of parental involvement in school.** Soldiers "place of duty" is at their child's school on the day of parent-teacher conferences. They are also relieved of their work responsibilities to volunteer at school each month.
- **Experienced and stable teaching force.** Staffed by "career teachers" who stay in one school for many years. All hold licenses and most hold graduate degrees and have over 10 years of experience.
- **High expectations.** High expectations are manifested in the use of high academic standards, a strong sense of personal accountability among teachers, educating students without ability grouping, and embracing high mobility as part of the culture of the school rather than an intractable problem.
- **Use of standardized test scores.** Standardized test scores are used for setting improvement goals, identifying interventions and monitoring change.
- **Small schools.** Most DoDEA schools are small—elementary schools have fewer than 350 students, middle schools have fewer than 600 and high schools have fewer than 900.
- **Robust sense of community.** DoDEA schools are in tight knit communities where there is a sense of shared responsibility for children's safety and well-being. There is housing stability, economic stability (at least one parent employed by the military), and health care services for all members of the community. Issues that are common in some urban neighborhoods, such as gang violence, are not present in these communities.
- **Social capital.** There are shared norms, values and attitudes that help promote trust and facilitate communication. Severe discipline problems, such as use of drugs, alcohol and violence, are rare because consequences are severe (for example, families can have their housing privileges revoked if the discipline code is violated).
- **Racial diversity and integration.** Both housing and schooling are racially integrated.

49 Information in this text box is drawn from: Smrekar, C., & Owens, D. (2003). "It's a way of life for us": High mobility and high achievement in Department of Defense schools. *Journal of Negro Education,* 72(1), 165-177.

Considerations for State Policymakers

Informed by the research findings presented in this report, we offer the following considerations for state policymakers. Considerations for school and district leaders can be found in the "Potential Solutions" section that begins on page 23 of this report.

Expand current efforts to better understand the implications of student mobility and support districts most impacted. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) recently began to calculate and report annual measures of student mobility at the state, district and school levels. And, in August 2010, DESE released a policy brief that compared MCAS performance of mobile and non-mobile students, and examined the demographic characteristics of mobile students.[50] Now that the state is able to track student mobility more accurately and has made some headway on examining the impact of student mobility, we urge DESE to consider conducting additional research. One study to consider involves examining the patterns of student mobility across the state in order to identify the clusters of school districts that routinely exchange mobile students. Once those clusters have been identified, DESE should consider providing technical assistance and financial support to those districts, perhaps through Readiness Centers, so they can work together to establish regional policies and practices for mitigating the challenges associated with student mobility. For example, districts may wish to consider regionalizing particular activities such as in-take and assessment of new students or parent/family outreach and engagement, or they may consider aligning curricula and instructional programs.

Develop the Readiness Passport, and incorporate individual indicators of student mobility. In 2008, as a component of his education strategy, Massachusetts Governor Patrick convened the Commonwealth Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet. The cabinet, modeled on similar efforts in other states, was charged with creating a statewide child and youth data reporting system or Readiness Passport. Among other objectives, the data system would facilitate smooth transition for students moving between schools. This data system is a critical component of efforts to address student mobility. The state recently began to calculate and report state-, district- and school-level indicators of student mobility. Student-level indicators are also needed to enable schools and districts to identify highly mobile students. Rhode Island, for example, tracks students with excessive mobility (three or more enrollments in one school year) as an early warning indicator.[51] This information would give schools and districts a way to identify students that may need additional support and connect their families with targeted housing services.

Develop a more flexible and responsive funding system. Consider modifying the funding system so there is a mechanism that allows schools to receive additional funding when the size and composition of the student body changes during the school year. Rather than determining the budget for the year, consider examining budgets quarterly and adjusting them based on actual enrollment and characteristics of the student body. Consider a minimum funding level that uses the October 1 prior year enrollment. This would allow schools with high mobility rates the flexibility to adjust staffing and resources as needed while ensuring some stability in the funding stream.

While holding all students to high standards, consider how to incorporate student mobility into the state accountability system. Mobile students bring a diverse, complex range of needs with them to school each day, yet most schools are not designed to address—or even identify—these needs for every child. This study found that some school and district leaders believe it is unrealistic to expect schools with high student turnover to progress in the same amount of time as schools with less-mobile student populations. Policymakers are urged to consider ways to acknowledge schools and districts that serve a constantly changing, high-need student body in the state accountability systems. Policymakers may wish to consider identifying mobile students as a special subgroup of students in the same way as students who receive special education services and English language learners. Policymakers may also wish to consider separate reporting of

50 O'Donnell, R & Gazos, A. (August 2010). *Student Mobility in Massachusetts.* Malden, MA: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

51 Early warning indicators are academic and non-academic factors that are used to identify students who may be at-risk for academic failure or in other ways, not on track to graduate. Early-warning indicators are used by schools, districts and states across the country to guide interventions and prevention strategies.

academic outcomes for mobile and non-mobile students. Reporting outcomes separately for mobile and non-mobile students will provide a more accurate picture of whether or not schools and districts serving highly mobile student bodies are making progress with both the stable and mobile segments of their student body. In addition, reporting student outcomes in this way would highlight those schools that are making progress with mobile students and enable others to learn from these schools.

Encourage schools of education to include coursework and training on working with mobile students. Previous research shows that teachers are trained to develop their instructional plans based on a classroom of students who will remain with them for an entire school year.[52] This finding was supported by the present study. For example, principals indicated that there is a need for additional professional development for teachers who have high turnover in their classrooms, with some indicating a need for training on effective instructional strategies for meeting the needs of highly mobile students (e.g., differentiated instruction), while others focused on the need for training on classroom management, discipline, sensitivity training about homelessness and other social or familial issues, and effectively dealing with students who have social and emotional problems. As a result, state education leaders and policymakers may wish to encourage schools of education to include in their teacher preparation programs—especially those aimed at preparing urban teachers—discussions about the needs of and most effective instructional practices for working with highly mobile students and non-mobile students attending highly mobile schools.

Interagency collaboration to address the root causes of student mobility. Collaboration among state agencies is required to address the root causes of student mobility, such as housing instability and issues related to family instability. Massachusetts' Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet is a state leadership team focused on streamlining state efforts to improve services for children, youth and families that is jointly chaired by the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Health and Human Services.[53] Reducing student mobility and addressing the challenges schools and districts face in meeting the needs of mobile students are issues the Cabinet may wish to consider as priority areas for collaborative state action. Literature on student mobility suggests that a first step is for state education agencies to collect and analyze information about the causes of student mobility and collaborate with appropriate state agencies to address the root problems.

Conclusion

Student mobility is most prevalent among Massachusetts' low-income and minority children, and children in the state's urban school districts. If the Commonwealth is truly committed to closing its persistent achievement gaps, additional attention and support must be provided to mobile students and the schools who serve the largest populations of these students. As the study revealed, schools are limited in their capacity to serve the range of academic, social and emotional needs of mobile students. In addition to the efforts taking place inside public schools, attention must be paid to the non-school factors (such as housing, employment and family instability) that cause mobility as well as the range of factors (such as lack of food, proper clothing, dental and health care) that impact students' readiness to learn. In order for Massachusetts public schools to achieve the goal of "all students college- and career-ready," the Commonwealth must prioritize addressing non-school factors so all students come to school ready to learn and are provided with every opportunity to achieve their fullest potential.

52 Lash, A. & Kirkpatrick, S. (1990). A classroom perspective on student mobility. *The Elementary School Journal,* 91 (2), 176-191; Gruman, D. H., Harachi, T. W., Abbott, R. D., Caralano, R. F., & Fleming, C.B. (Nov/Dec 2008). Longitudinal effects of student mobility on three dimensions of elementary school engagement. *Child Development,* 79(6), 1833-1852.

53 For more information about the Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet, see: Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy (2009) *Toward Interagency Collaboration: The Role of Children's Cabinets*. Available online: http://renniecenter.issuelab.org/research/listing/toward_interagency_collaboration_the_role_of_childrens_cabinets.

Appendix A–Detailed Methodology

Sample Selection

A small sample of 12 schools in 6 districts was selected for participation in this study. The sample selection began by choosing 6 school districts from the 11 cities identified by MassINC as Gateway Cities. To ensure that all regions of the state were reflected in the study, 2 Gateway Cities in each of 3 regions of Massachusetts were selected. Springfield and Holyoke were selected from the western region. Fitchburg and Worcester were selected from the central region. Brockton and Haverhill were selected from the eastern region.

Within each district, schools were selected based on the percentage of students who transferred into or out of the school over the course of the school year (referred to throughout this report as churn rate). From among the schools in each district with the highest churn rates, schools with consistently high churn rates over a three year period (school years 2007–08 to 2009–10) were selected.[54] One school serving students in grades K-8 (any grade level configuration) and one high school were selected from each district. In some districts there was only one high school, so that school was selected for the study. Churn rates for participating districts and schools are shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8. Churn rates in participating districts and schools

DISTRICT	SCHOOL	2009–10		2008–09		2007–08	
		Adjusted Enrollment	Churn Rate	Adjusted Enrollment	Churn Rate	Adjusted Enrollment	Churn Rate
Brockton		**16,639**	**15.5%**	**16,412**	**17.0%**	**16,362**	**16.0%**
	Arnone Elementary (K-5)[55]	862	16.7%	760	40.1%	784	14.7%
	Brockton High (9-12)	4,319	15.9%	4,388	16.3%	4,538	17.7%
Fitchburg		**5,519**	**22.3%**	**5,691**	**28.8%**	**5,816**	**25.4%**
	McKay Campus (preK-4)	523	30.0%	550	28.2%	510	40.0%
	Fitchburg High (9-12)	1,311	21.0%	1,422	21.6%	1,411	19.3%
Haverhill		**7,296**	**15.4%**	**7,379**	**17.3%**	**7,913**	**16.6%**
	Haverhill High (9-12)	1,908	18.2%	2,008	18.2%	2,118	19.3%
Holyoke		**6,521**	**27.6%**	**6,646**	**28.9%**	**6,806**	**27.5%**
	Peck Full-Service Community (K-8)	723	39.6%	829	48.0%	254	29.9%
	Dean Technical High (9-12)	688	27.9%	688	27.9%	786	30.7%
Springfield		**27,355**	**23.2%**	**27,505**	**23.1%**	**27,672**	**23.4%**
	Sumner Avenue (preK-5)	600	35.2%	563	32.9%	587	44.8%
	High School Of Commerce (9-12)	1,589	37.3%	1,468	32.6%	1,634	29.7%
Worcester		**25,663**	**18.0%**	**24,783**	**17.3%**	**24,624**	**17.0%**
	Belmont Street Community (preK-6)	576	32.6%	583	40.1%	504	34.7%
	Burncoat Senior High (9-12)	1,191	18.1%	1,324	20.5%	1,401	21.9%

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Note: Adjusted enrollment is the number of students enrolled at any point in time during the school year. This is not equivalent to the district's/school's October 1 enrollment as reported in enrollment reports on the DESE website and as shown in Table 9 of this report. Churn is the percentage of students who transferred into or out of the school/district at any time during the school year.

54 Alternative schools, schools serving pre-kindergarten and kindergarten only, and schools that did not have three full years of data were excluded.

55 In 2008–09, Arnone Elementary became a K-5. It had previously been a K-6 school.

Characteristics of Participating Schools and Districts

Characteristics of participating schools and districts are shown in Table 9. Compared to statewide figures, most of the participating schools and districts have higher percentages of students who are low-income, non-white, and whose first language is not English.

TABLE 9. Characteristics of participating districts and schools (2010–11)

DISTRICT / SCHOOL		ENROLLMENT	DEMOGRAPHICS							MCAS CPI	
			% Low-Income	% White	% Black	% His-panic	% Asian	% SPED	% FLNE	ELA	Math
STATE		*966,395*	*34.2*	*68.0*	*8.2*	*15.4*	*5.5*	*17.0*	*16.3*	*86.9*	*79.9*
Brockton		**15,977**	**72.8**	**27.0**	**52.0**	**14.4**	**2.6**	**13.5**	**32.9**	**86.7**	**78.2**
	Arnone Elementary (K-5)	807	87.9	14.7	56.4	21.1	1.1	15.0	30.5	70.3	59.6
	Brockton High (9-12)	4,145	71.4	26.2	56.7	12.3	2.3	10.9	36.0	88.2	79.9
Fitchburg		**4,990**	**67.9**	**40.7**	**6.8**	**42.2**	**5.7**	**21.4**	**31.6**	**84.3**	**83.7**
	McKay Campus (preK-4)	408	69.4	40.9	3.2	40.2	4.9	23.5	26.2	70.7	67.0
	Fitchburg High (9-12)	1,146	62.9	43.7	10.3	37.3	6.8	19.6	28.1	84.8	84.0
Haverhill		**6,845**	**40.3**	**68.9**	**4.1**	**24.8**	**1.7**	**21.7**	**15.7**	**88.0**	**81.6**
	Haverhill High (9-12)	1,748	41.1	69.5	4.8	22.9	2.3	19.8	15.7	89.7	84.2
Holyoke		**5,987**	**82.5**	**18.2**	**3.4**	**77.2**	**0.9**	**26.2**	**50.8**	**80.6**	**74.7**
	Peck Full-Service Community (K-8)	612	92.5	4.4	5.6	88.9	1.1	22.4	65.0	58.9	51.9
	Dean Technical High (9-12)*	659	90.9	8.3	0.9	90.1	0.6	38.7	72.7	68.4	62.9
Springfield		**25,512**	**84.2**	**14.2**	**21.4**	**58.3**	**2.2**	**22.8**	**24.4**	**77.6**	**65.9**
	Sumner Avenue (preK-5)	540	81.7	13.3	19.1	59.3	3.9	27.0	23.3	65.6	61.6
	High School Of Commerce (9-12)*	1,286	80.9	8.6	25.7	62.4	1.4	29.0	33.4	72.4	59.9
Worcester		**24,642**	**70.1**	**36.5**	**13.6**	**38.3**	**8.1**	**20.9**	**43.2**	**85.3**	**79.0**
	Belmont Street Community (preK-6)	488	88.9	18.2	19.9	51.2	4.5	19.3	48.0	69.6	68.7
	Burncoat Senior High (9-12)	1,072	59.3	40.1	18.7	34.8	4.9	22.1	37.6	87.4	82.1

Source: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website, District/School Profiles pages

MCAS CPI is Composite Performance Index, which is a 100-point index that combines the scores of students who take standard MCAS tests with the scores of those who take the MCAS-alternate and is a measure of the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency in English language arts and mathematics. % Low-Income is the percentage of students who receive free and reduced price lunch. % SPED is the percentage of students with a special education designation. % FLNE is the percentage of students designated as first language not English. ELA is the English language arts test.

** These schools are Level 4 schools.*

Interview Protocol

The primary purpose of the interviews was to gain an understanding of how student mobility impacts schools and districts with high mobility rates and shed light on the challenges that schools and districts face in meeting the needs of mobile students. The interview protocol covered five topics:

- Common reasons students enter or leave the school/district during the school year;
- Challenges in meeting the needs of mobile students;
- Impact of student mobility on students, teachers and school/district staff;
- Policies, programs or initiatives in place that are designed to address the needs of mobile students or alleviate any negative impact of student mobility; and
- Assistance, resources or regulatory/statutory changes needed in order to overcome challenges associated with student mobility or support schools/districts in addressing issues associated with student mobility.

Appendix B–Study Participants

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL NAME	PARTICIPANTS
Brockton	
Arnone Elementary School (K-5)	Colleen Proudler, Principal Linda Nogueira, Kindergarten Teacher
Brockton High School (9-12)	Susan Szachowicz, Principal Audrey Mbhani, ESL Teacher Grades 9-12 Anna Carreiro, Bilingual Department Head, Grades 9-12 Catherine Leger, Head of the Guidance Counselor Office, Grades 9-12
Brockton (District)	Ethan Cancell, Associate Director, Accountability, Planning & Technology Soraya DeBarros, Director of Parent Information and School Registration Center
Fitchburg	
McKay Campus School (preK-4)	Ruth Joseph, Interim Principal Jennifer M. Fichtel, Assistant Principal Mary DelTergo, 1st Grade Teacher
Fitchburg High School (9-12)	Richard Masciarelli, Principal Ron Williams, Social Studies Teacher Susan Leahy, Guidance Counselor
Fitchburg (District)	Andre R Ravenelle, Superintendent Bonnie Baer-Simahk, Director, Parent Enrollment Center
Haverhill	
Haverhill High School (9-12)	Bernard Nangle, Principal Dave Reed, ELL Teacher
Haverhill (District)	Mary Malone, Assistant Superintendent
Holyoke	
William R. Peck Full-Service Community School (K-8)	Paul Hyry-Dermith, Principal Yaldira Felix Brown, Case Manager Supervisor Katie Silva Moran, 7th Grade ELA Teacher
William J. Dean Technical High School (9-12)	Linda Rex, Principal John Cavanaugh, Assistant Principal Lori McKenna, 12th Grade English Teacher (Head of English and Social Studies Depts.)
Holyoke (District)	David Dupont, Superintendent Doug Arnold, Director of Student Services
Springfield	
Sumner Avenue School (preK-5)	Lisa Bakowski, Principal Erin Carr, Adjustment Counselor Yvette Reardon, Kindergarten Teacher
High School of Commerce (9-12)	Paul Nycz, Principal Kim Varzeas, Guidance Counselor Deb Lindner, 11th Grade English Teacher
Springfield (District)	Dan Warwick, Assistant Superintendent Beth Narvaez, Chief Academic Officer
Worcester	
Belmont Street Community School (preK-6)	Susan Proulx, Principal Kelly McNamara, Adjustment Counselor Justine Wahlstron, 3rd Grade Teacher
Burncoat Senior High School	William Foley, Principal Christine Steinwand, Adjustment Counselor Meg Brunelle, 9th–11th Grade History Teacher
Worcester (District)	Melinda Boone, Superintendent Mark Berthiaume, Communication and School Support Coordinator

Appendix C–Additional Data on Gateway Cities

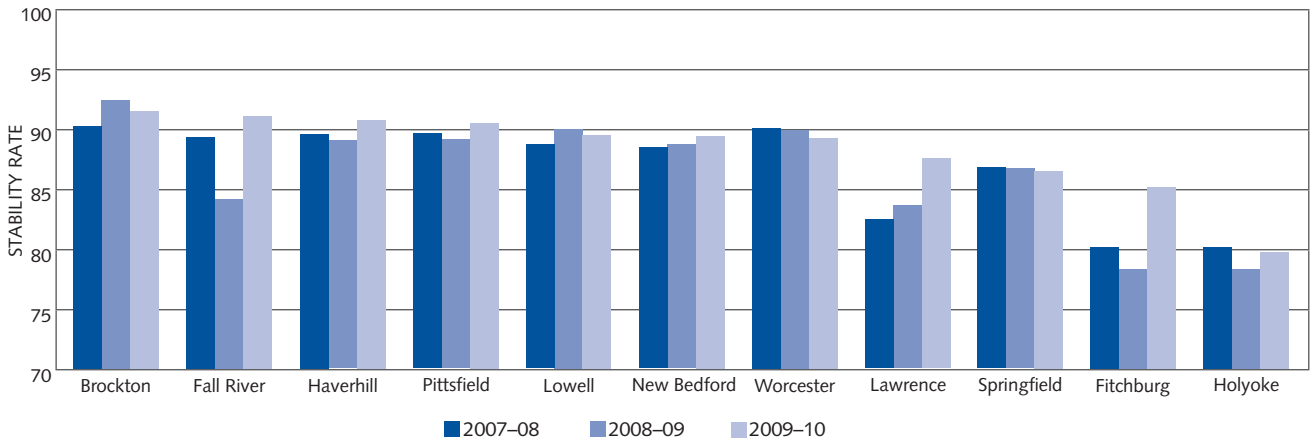
Table 10: Selected population characteristics

CHARACTERISTICS	GATEWAY CITIES	MASSACHUSETTS
Race (alone or in combination with other races)		
White	73.7%	84.3%
Hispanic or Latino	22.8%	8.3%
Black or African American	10.1%	7.1%
Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	4.3%	5.3%
Other	14.4%	5.3%
Home rental/ownership		
Owner-occupied	49.6%	64.9%
Renter-occupied	50.4%	35.1%
Educational attainment		
High school graduate or higher	77.3%	88.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	19.8%	37.7%
Employment and income		
Unemployment	8.6%	5.9%
Median household income (dollars)	43,379	64,684
Families whose income in the past 12 months is below the poverty level	16.9%	7.1%
Immigration		
Foreign born	16.3%	14.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2008 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, *Data Profile, Massachusetts.*

Stability rates in Gateway City districts have ranged from a low of 78.1 to a high of 92.1 over the last three years. The stability rate is the percentage of students that were continuously enrolled in a district throughout the school year. As shown in Figure 6, stability rates have also fluctuated over the last three years in most of the Gateway Cities. In New Bedford and Lawrence, stability rates have increased. In Springfield and Worcester, rates have decreased. Given that churn rates and in-take rates have been highest in Holyoke, Fitchburg, Lawrence and Springfield, it is no surprise that the stability rates in these cities are the lowest. Last year, Holyoke had the lowest stability rate at 79.4 and Brockton had the highest at 91.5.

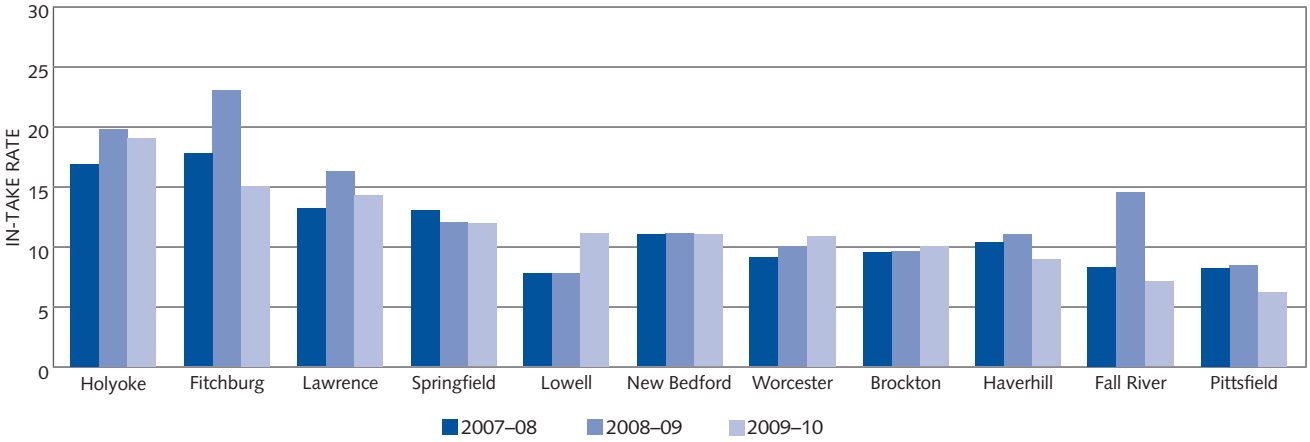
FIGURE 6. Stability rates: Percentage of students who were contiuously enrolled in the district throughout the school year (2007–08, 2008–09, 2009–10)



In-take rates in Gateway City districts have ranged from a high of 19.9 to a low of 6.5 over the last three years.

The in-take rate is the percentage of students that transferred into a district after the beginning of the school year. As shown in Figure 7, there has been some fluctuation with in-take rates in the Gateway Cities. In one city, New Bedford, in-take rates have been fairly consistent over the last three years. Lowell witnessed an increase in 2009–10 after consistent in-take rates in 2007–08 and 2008–09. In Worcester and Brockton, in-take rates have increased and in Springfield, they have decreased. As was the case with churn rates, in-take rates have been highest in Holyoke, Fitchburg, Lawrence and Springfield. Last year, Holyoke had the highest in-take rate at 18.8 and Pittsfield had the lowest at 6.5.

FIGURE 7. In-take rates: Percentage of students who transferred into the district after the beginning of the school year (2007–08, 2008–09, 2009–10)



Last year, Holyoke had the highest in-take rate among the Gateway Cities at 18.8 which translates into approximately 1,226 students entering the district during the school year. Pittsfield had the lowest in-take rate at 6.5 which translates into approximately 418 students entering during the school year. As shown in Table 11, Springfield, the largest district in the Gateway Cities, had approximately 3,310 students enter the district in 2009–10.

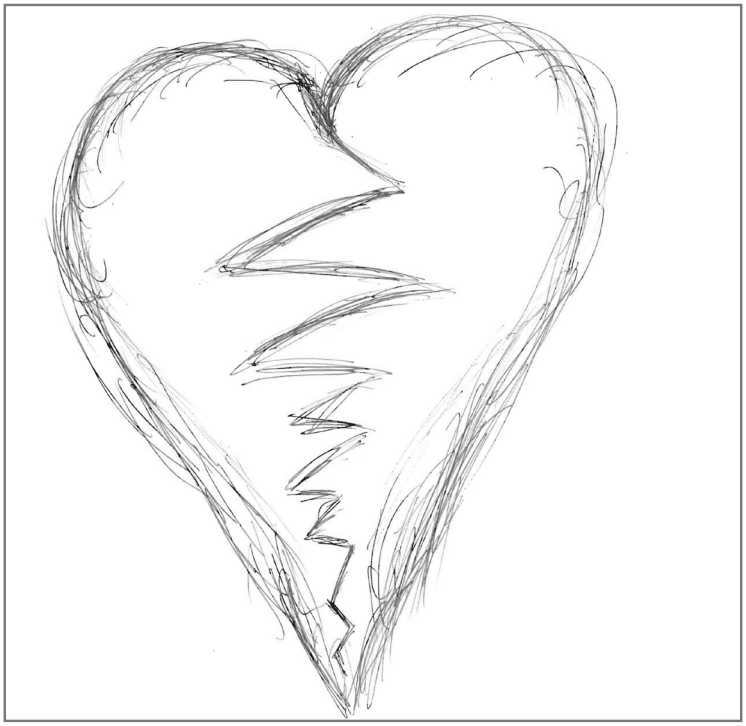
TABLE 11. In-take rates and number of students who transferred into Gateway City districts (2009–10)

DISTRICT	ADJUSTED ENROLLMENT	IN-TAKE RATE	# OF STUDENTS WHO TRANSFERRED IN
Holyoke	6,521	18.8	1,226
Springfield	5,519	15.0	828
Fitchburg	13,595	14.3	1,944
Lawrence	27,355	12.1	3,310
New Bedford	14,325	10.8	1,547
Worcester	13,578	10.7	1,453
Lowell	25,663	10.7	2,746
Fall River	16,639	10.0	1,664
Brockton	7,296	8.8	642
Haverhill	10,486	7.3	765
Pittsfield	6,433	6.5	418

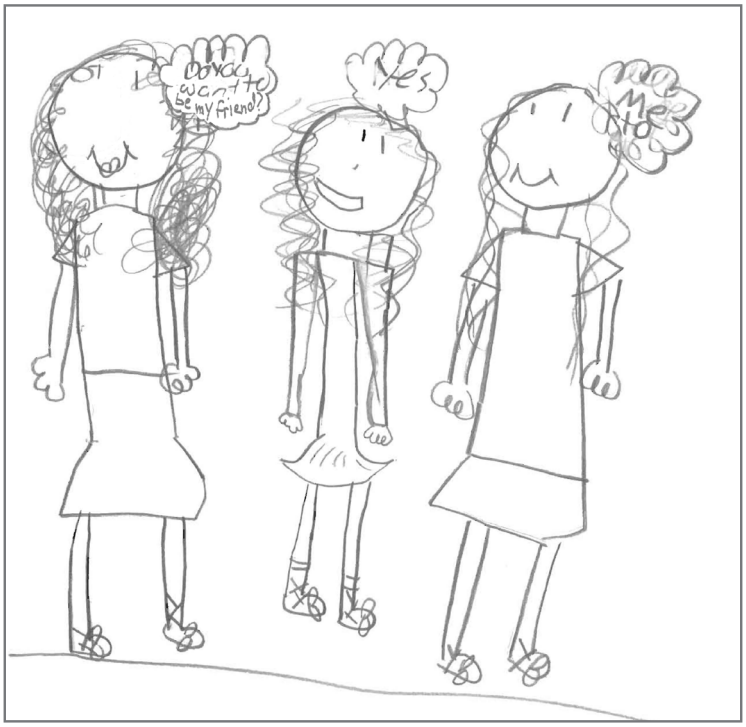
Note: Adjusted enrollment is the number of students enrolled at any point in time during the school year. This is not equivalent to the district's October 1 enrollment as reported in enrollment reports on the DESE website. Number of students who transferred in was calculated based on in-take rate and adjusted enrollment and, thus, is approximate.

Appendix D–Examples of Students' Drawings

Drawing 1 The drawing below, submitted by a high school student, is an example of a response where it was unclear whether the student was depicting his/her response to students transferring into or out of the class.



Drawing 2 The drawing below, submitted by an elementary school student, in an example of a response depicting a happy or welcoming environment where students make friends.



Drawing 3 The drawing below, submitted by an elementary school student, in an example of a response depicting a student, presumed to be mobile, who is sad and afraid that no one in the class will like him/her.

Drawing 4 The drawing below, submitted by an elementary school student, is an example of a response depicting a sad or emotional environment when a student leaves.