

COMMENTARY

Reducing School Mobility with a Relationship-Building Intervention

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[PACE](#) | Policy Analysis for California Education

PUBLISHED: November 19, 2013

It is quite common for children in the United States to change schools. School changes result from many factors, including grade-to-grade transitions, residential moves associated with financial or family upheaval, or dissatisfaction with the current school. Changing schools can be stressful and disruptive for mobile students as well as their peers, teachers, and schools, so mobility is often problematic. Furthermore, because mobility is most prevalent among low-income students, racial/ethnic minorities, and those with limited English proficiency, it contributes to educational inequality.

As a potential remedy, scholars have advised schools to reduce unnecessary school mobility by building and improving relationships with families, but these efforts are rarely tested rigorously. In a new study, [Jeremy Fiel](#) (Rice University), [Anna Haskins](#) (Columbia University), and [Ruth López Turley](#) (Rice University) evaluate the ability of a school-based intervention to reduce mobility by building and improving relationships among parents and between parents and schools. As part of the [Children, Families, and Schools Study](#), the [Families and Schools Together \(FAST\)](#) intervention, which endeavors to build social capital among families, children and schools, targeted families of first graders and was randomly assigned to 26 of 52 predominantly low-income Hispanic elementary schools in San Antonio, TX, and Phoenix, AZ.

The authors examined whether student mobility between first and third grades was lower in schools that received the intervention or among students whose families participated in the program's core after-school activities. Overall, the FAST intervention failed to reduce mobility; between 35 and 45 percent of students in the sample changed schools at least once. Among Black students, however, mobility was especially high, and FAST had a substantial effect: over half of Black students in control schools changed schools, compared to 38 percent in FAST schools, bringing their mobility rates to par with those of other groups. Thus, FAST was especially beneficial for Black families who participated in the intervention, and it seems to have worked mainly by improving relationships among families in these schools.

The study indicates that efforts to reduce school mobility depend on the reasons families change schools. In socioeconomically disadvantaged populations where mobility stems from family circumstances, there may be little that schools can do. But when families are dissatisfied with a school or feel socially isolated from the school community, schools may be able to reduce student turnover by building relationships.

*The [full study](#) (gated) is in Fiel, Jeremy E., Anna R. Haskins, and Ruth N. López Turley, "Reducing School Mobility: A Randomized Trial of a Relationship-Building Intervention," *American Education Research Journal*, forthcoming.*

Suggested citation Policy Analysis for California Education. (2013, November). *Reducing school mobility with a relationship-building intervention*



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