The Importance of School Stability for Youth in Foster Care

Did you know?

SCHOOL MOBILITY AND YOUTH IN CARE

- Foster children experience an average of one to two home placement changes per year while in out of home care.¹
- School mobility rates are highest for those entering care for the first time. Over two-thirds of students in a large study of Chicago foster youth switched schools shortly after their initial placement in out of home care.²
- Nearly half of New York City foster children are placed outside their borough of origin, and only 11.2% are placed in the same community district.³
- A study of foster care alumni in Oregon and Washington State found that 65% of youth had experienced seven or more school changes from elementary through high school.⁴

EFFECTS OF SCHOOL MOBILITY:

On a Student’s Academics…

- Every time a student changes schools, it can take four to six months to recover academically.⁵
- Highly mobile students have significantly lower test scores and are far more likely to repeat a grade than stable students.⁶
- Nearly 45% of New York foster youth reported being retained at least once in school.⁷

On High School Completion…

- Repeating a grade in school significantly increases the chance of dropping out.⁸
- High school students who change schools even once are less than half as likely to graduate as those who do not change schools.⁹
- Foster youth are half as likely as their peers to graduate from high school and are more than twice as likely to drop out of school.¹⁰

On the Schools…

- High rates of student mobility are disruptive to classrooms and schools, slowing the pace of instruction as new students adapt to school rules and peers.¹¹
- Instruction and content presented to students in schools with large numbers of highly mobile students is about a year behind instruction in schools with a more stable student population.¹²
- Re-teaching material so that new students can catch up contributes to classroom management problems and affects social cohesion within the classroom.¹³
Other Effects…

- Multiple moves while in foster care, with the attendant disruption and uncertainty, can be deleterious to a young child’s brain growth, mental development, and psychological adjustment.\(^1\)
- Children in foster care who change schools often feel stigmatized because of their foster care status and have trouble forming peer networks and support systems.\(^2\)
- Highly mobile students are less likely to be able to rely on schools for important non-academic supports like role models and social capital, which are extremely important for children in foster care.\(^3\)

3 City of New York, Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report, p. 31 (Feb 2009)
4 Pecora et al., Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, pp. 26, 28 (2005)
5 Casey Family Programs, Educating Children in Foster Care: The McKinney-Vento and No Child Left Behind Acts, p. 11 (2007)
8 Rumberger and Thomas, The distribution of dropout and turnover rates among urban and suburban high schools, p. 14 (2000)
9 Rumberger et al., The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools, p. 37 (1999)
12 Kerbow, School mobility, curricular pace, and stable student achievement (1998)
15 Yu et al., Improving educational outcomes for youth in care: A national collaboration (2002)
16 See Casey Family Programs, Educating Children in Foster Care: The McKinney-Vento and No Child Left Behind Acts, p.7 (2007)