



# Advocates for Children of New York

## **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.<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>2</sup>
- 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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>4</sup>

#### **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.<sup>5</sup>
- Highly mobile students have significantly lower test scores and are far more likely to repeat a grade than stable students.<sup>6</sup>
- Nearly 45% of New York foster youth reported being retained at least once in school.<sup>7</sup>

##### **On High School Completion...**

- Repeating a grade in school significantly increases the chance of dropping out.<sup>8</sup>
- High school students who change schools even once are less than half as likely to graduate as those who do not change schools.<sup>9</sup>
- 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.<sup>10</sup>

##### **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.<sup>11</sup>
- 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.<sup>12</sup>
- Re-teaching material so that new students can catch up contributes to classroom management problems and affects social cohesion within the classroom.<sup>13</sup>

## **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.<sup>14</sup>
- 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.<sup>15</sup>
- 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.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2002)

<sup>2</sup> Smithgall et al., Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care, p. 46 (2004)

<sup>3</sup> City of New York, Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, p. 31 (Feb 2009)

<sup>4</sup> Pecora et al., Improving family foster care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study, pp. 26, 28 (2005)

<sup>5</sup> Casey Family Programs, Educating Children in Foster Care: The McKinney-Vento and No Child Left Behind Acts, p. 11 (2007)

<sup>6</sup> Schafft, The Incidence and Impacts of Student Transiency in Upstate New York's Rural School Districts, p.2 (2005)

<sup>7</sup> Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., Educational Neglect: The delivery of educational services to children in New York City's foster care system, p. 45 (2000)

<sup>8</sup> Rumberger and Thomas, The distribution of dropout and turnover rates among urban and suburban high schools, p. 14 (2000)

<sup>9</sup> Rumberger et al., The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools, p. 37 (1999)

<sup>10</sup> Smithgall et al., Educational experiences of children in out-of-home care, p. 28 (2004); Blome, What happens to foster kids: Educational experiences of a random sample of foster care youth and a matched group of foster care youth. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, Vol. 14 (1), pp. 41-53 (1997)

<sup>11</sup> Conniff, Bouncing from school to school. *The Progressive*, Vol. 62 No. 11, p. 21-25 (1998); Sanderson, Veteran teachers' perspectives on student mobility. *Essays in Education*, p. 4 (2003)

<sup>12</sup> Kerbow, School mobility, curricular pace, and stable student achievement (1998)

<sup>13</sup> Schafft, The Incidence and Impacts of Student Transiency in Upstate New York's Rural School Districts, p.2 (2005)

<sup>14</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Developmental Issues for Young Children in Foster Care, *PEDIATRICS* Vol. 106 No. 5, p. 1148 (2000)

<sup>15</sup> Yu et al., Improving educational outcomes for youth in care: A national collaboration (2002)

<sup>16</sup> See Casey Family Programs, Educating Children in Foster Care: The McKinney-Vento and No Child Left Behind Acts, p.7 (2007)