

## **Student Mobility -- the 'elephant in the room' that no one wants to acknowledge.**

*By: Directors of the School Accountability Roundtable (S.A.R.)*

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Ohio's new state report card reflects a vast amount of school data. It contains every measurement anyone could want to analyze a school's performance. *Achievement, Gap Closing, K-3 Literacy, Progress and Graduation Rate. Even, Prepared for Success.* But one of the most important metrics has been omitted — *student mobility*.

In 2010, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute teamed with Community Research Partners (CRP) and launched a groundbreaking research project titled, Student Nomads – Mobility in Ohio's Schools. (<http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/student-nomads-mobility-in-ohios-schools.html>)

They used student-level data (over 6 million student records) to gauge the mobility of students across all of Ohio's 3,500 + public (district and charter) school buildings and e-schools. Relying on the state department's Education Management Information System (EMIS) database from two school years (October 2009 to May 2011) they looked at every K-12 school move across the Buckeye State.

But, CRP went further and took an exhaustive examination of five metro areas – Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Toledo, as well as into the state's major e-schools. The results of this year-long study are significant, wide-ranging, and absolutely foundational for a better understanding of how Ohio's educational system functions (or dysfunctions) in the face of significant numbers of student moves and movers.

The statewide research conducted by CRP found that the prevalence of student mobility is considerably greater than most appreciate or fully understand. *Student mobility verges on the epidemic in inner-city schools; but, it is also common in suburbs and rural schools.*

### **The Impact of Student Mobility on Academic Performance**

The Fordham/CRP report noted that, persistently mobile students do less well in school than their non-moving peers. Scores were lowest for the economically disadvantaged, Blacks, and multiple movers.

## Grade Level of Students Transferring to New School

Another metric which is not currently reflected on Ohio's report card would be the variables of bringing newly enrolled students *up to grade level*. Often, students transfer to new schools several years below grade level. The accepting school must both educate -- and race to close that deficiency gap, often, a failing of the student's previous school. This situation is further exasperated by the high rate of student mobility.

## Recommendation

It is virtually impossible for Ohio to accurately measure the effectiveness of schools without taking into consideration student mobility as one of the dynamics. When schools, serving inner-city students, experience vast 'churning' of students throughout the school year, it is unreliable to grade schools as though their student population was stable.

- S.A.R. proposes that the Department of Education develop new metrics for the state report card. One should reflect a school's level of *student mobility* that can be factored into the grading system.

A second indicator that should be part of the report card would note any grade level deficiency of students that transfer to a new school.

- If the initial school fails to educate students and can merely shift them from their enrollment roles without consequences – then the accepting school who assumes the role of both educating while closing that student's deficiency gap should have that factored into their report card.

- And lastly, the Value-Added component of the state report card should be tabulated based on the methodology used by the Ohio Department of Education up through the 2011 academic year. This model reflects the original Sanders Value-Added calculation eliminating students from feeder schools with fewer than five students. The model was crafted in this manner to eliminate error introduced by student mobility. This can be achieved by tabulating value-added results based on students that have stayed with a school for two or more years to help reduce the impact of student mobility.

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*---Directors of the School Accountability Roundtable are data experts, academic officers, and administrators of testing and assessment of quality Ohio public schools. The value of their recommendations is supported by actual school level knowledge and operational experience.*