

Parental Involvement /
Student Mobility

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GAO

United States General Accounting Office

Report to the Honorable
Marcy Kaptin, House of Representatives

February 1997

**ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL CHILDREN****Many Change Schools
Frequently, Harming
Their Education**



United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Health, Education, and
Human Services Division

B-251230

February 4, 1994

The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
House of Representatives

Dear Ms. Kaptur:

The United States has one of the highest mobility rates of all developed countries; annually, about one-fifth of all Americans move. Elementary school children who move frequently face disruption to their lives, including their schooling. And, sadly, these children are often not helped to adjust to the disruption of a new school—new children, teachers, and principal—and to make sense of the variations in curriculum between the old school and the new. The success of children who change schools frequently may therefore be jeopardized. In addition, as the schools pay greater attention to high academic standards, advocated by national and state leaders,¹ these children may face increased difficulty in achieving success.

In response to these concerns, you asked us to obtain information on children who change schools frequently: (1) their number and characteristics, (2) their success in school relative to children who have never changed schools, (3) the help that federal educational programs, such as Migrant Education and Chapter 1, provide, and (4) the help that improved student record systems could provide.

Results in Brief

One in six of the nation's children who are third-graders²—over a half million—have changed schools frequently,³ attending at least three different schools since the beginning of first grade. Unless policymakers focus greater attention on the needs of children who have changed schools frequently—often low-income, inner city, migrant, and limited English

¹Early in 1990, President George Bush and the nation's governors agreed to a set of six National Education Goals for the year 2000 concerning (1) readiness for school, (2) graduation from school, (3) academic achievement and citizenship, (4) math and science achievement, (5) adult literacy, and (6) drug- and violence-free schools. The third and fourth goals, in particular, call for high academic standards in certain school subjects.

²Our analyses of the Department of Education's Prospects Study data focus on third-graders in school year 1990-91 (see Scope and Methodology, p. 4). We use the term children to refer to these third-graders.

³When referring to our analyses of the data from the Prospects Study, we use the term "children who have changed schools frequently" to refer only to third-graders who have attended three or more schools since the beginning of first grade. When not referring to Prospects Study data, we use the term more generally to refer to mobile children.

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proficient (LEP)—these children may continue to be low achieving in math and reading, as well as to repeat a grade. Local school districts generally provide little additional help to assist mobile children.

The Department of Education can play a role in helping mobile children to receive appropriate educational services in a timely manner. Specifically, the Department can develop strategies so that all eligible children, including those who have changed schools frequently, will have access to federally funded Migrant Education and Chapter 1 services. Children who have changed schools frequently are not as likely to receive services provided by the federal Migrant Education and Chapter 1 programs as children who have never changed schools.

Timely and comparable record systems could be one way to help mobile children receive services. A child's records often take 2 to 6 weeks to arrive in a new school, according to data collected by the California State Department of Education and others. Moreover, student records often are not comparable across states and districts. The federal Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS), established to transfer information from a migrant child's former school district to a new school district, also does not provide timely and complete information. However, other systems, such as one currently being piloted in a few states, may in the future provide comparable and more timely transfer of student records for all children, including migrants.

Background

High numbers of mobile children, school officials have reported, can interfere with teachers' ability to organize and deliver instruction. While the mobility of children is often a reflection of underlying family issues, such as shortages of affordable housing, changes in marital status, or unemployment, it is the schools that must face the difficult challenge of meeting the educational needs of children who change schools frequently. Teachers may find it difficult to assess the needs of such new children, determine their past educational experiences, and provide instruction that builds on these experiences. These tasks may be especially difficult when many new children enter the classroom throughout the year, often with no advance notice. Children may be exposed to curriculums that vary greatly across schools and districts; therefore, if they move from one school to another in the middle of the school year, they may have difficulty catching up in all subjects by the end of the school year.

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Some children who have changed schools frequently may be eligible for federal education programs for reasons other than their mobility. If these children are low achievers, for example, they may be eligible for Chapter 1 services in subjects such as reading and math. In fiscal year 1993, the federal government appropriated over \$6.1 billion for school districts to provide supplementary education services to low-achieving children in those schools and grades served by the Chapter 1 program.⁴

Another federal program, the Migrant Education Program, provides services for one group of children who are likely to change schools frequently—children of migrant agricultural workers and fishers. About 440,000 migrant children were provided with educational, medical, or social services through this program, which was funded at about \$300 million for fiscal year 1993. The program serves children who are “currently migrant”—those who have moved from one school district to another within the last 12 months—as well as “formerly migrant” children; the latter are eligible to receive services for an additional 5 years after they are no longer categorized as “currently migrant.” Under the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988, states, in delivering services, are required to give currently migrant children priority over formerly migrant children.⁵ A recent House bill proposes to limit migrant education services to migrant children who have changed school districts within the last 2 years.

Recently, the attention of national and state leaders has been focused on meeting the six National Education Goals, including developing and adopting high standards in school subjects for all children. As policymakers have focused on how all children will meet high standards, policymakers have also been examining ways to determine the progress of all children and ensure that they receive the services they need. As one way to determine children's progress, the National Education Goals Panel has recommended a voluntary student record system, which would help to monitor the progress of all children, even if they move among schools. Thus, issues related to the mobility of all children have reached national prominence on the educational policy agenda.

⁴We did not focus on smaller programs that may also serve children who change schools frequently, such as Part A of the Bilingual Education Act program—Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1985, the Emergency Immigrant Education Act program, and the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act program.

⁵Unless otherwise noted, the term migrant children applies to both currently and formerly migrant children.

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Scope and Methodology

Children's mobility can be measured in different ways, including changes in residence or changes in schools. In our analysis, we focus on the latter. We analyzed data, collected during school year 1990-91 by the Department of Education's Prospects Study,⁶ to determine the extent to which children change schools frequently; the characteristics of these children, including their achievement rates; and the help these children receive from federal education programs (see app. D). The study provided nationally representative information on third-graders; about 15,000 third-graders, in 235 elementary schools, and their parents, teachers, and school principals completed questionnaires.

The Prospects Study contained a measure of a child's mobility—the number of schools that a third-grader has attended since the beginning of first grade. This measure allowed us to separate children into three groups. The first group, those who have attended the same school since first grade, we refer to as those who have never changed schools. We also provide information on a second group, those who have attended two schools since first grade. The third group, those who have attended three or more schools since first grade, we refer to as children who have changed schools frequently.

We interviewed officials from the Department of Education's Migrant Education and Chapter 1 programs to examine (1) the extent to which children who have changed schools frequently receive federally funded education program services and (2) the effect changing schools may have on children who are served by these programs.⁷ We also met with staff from the National Education Goals Panel and the Council of Chief State School Officers to discuss the development and implementation of the Exchange of Permanent Records Electronically for Students and Schools (EXPRESS) system; through this exchange, elementary and secondary schools, in different localities and states, would be able to voluntarily transfer student records electronically. We interviewed staff, from one state and one district, who are conducting pilots using the EXPRESS system.

To provide examples of how children's mobility may affect their instruction and achievement, we (1) conducted a case study of a school in

⁶The Department of Education provided us with cross-tabulation data from its Prospects Study, a congressionally mandated study to determine the short- and long-term consequences of children's participation in the Chapter 1 program.

⁷We use the term Migrant Education Program to refer to services authorized in Part D, Subpart 1, Chapter 1 of Title I of the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988. We use the term Chapter 1 to refer to services authorized in Part A, Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies, of Chapter 1.

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Maryland with a high rate of mobility and (2) compared our results with a similar case study conducted in California (see app. II). We also reviewed the literature on issues related to frequent school changes and their effects on children.

We conducted our review from January 1992 through September 1993 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Low-Income, Inner City, Migrant, and LEP Children Are More Likely to Have Changed Schools Frequently

Children who are from low-income families or attend inner city schools are more likely than others to have changed schools frequently. Overall, about 17 percent of all third-graders—more than a half million—have changed schools frequently, attending three or more schools since first grade. Of third-graders from low-income families—that is, with incomes below \$10,000—30 percent have changed schools frequently, compared with about 10 percent from families with incomes of \$25,000 and above (see app. I). About 25 percent of third-graders in inner city schools have changed schools frequently, compared with about 15 percent of third-graders in rural or suburban schools.

An inner city child, compared with one in a suburban or rural school, may be more likely to change schools frequently, in part, because he or she is more likely to come from a low-income family. Another factor that could contribute to an inner city child changing schools is that such a child may move only a short distance, yet move into a new school attendance area; however, a child in a larger, less densely populated school attendance area—for example, in a suburban or rural school district—may move several miles and still attend the same school.

Migrant and LEP children also are much more likely than others to have changed schools frequently: about 40 percent of migrant children have changed schools frequently, compared with about 17 percent of all children. Among LEP children, about 34 percent have changed schools frequently.

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Children Who Have Changed Schools Frequently Are More Likely to Be Low Achievers and to Repeat a Grade

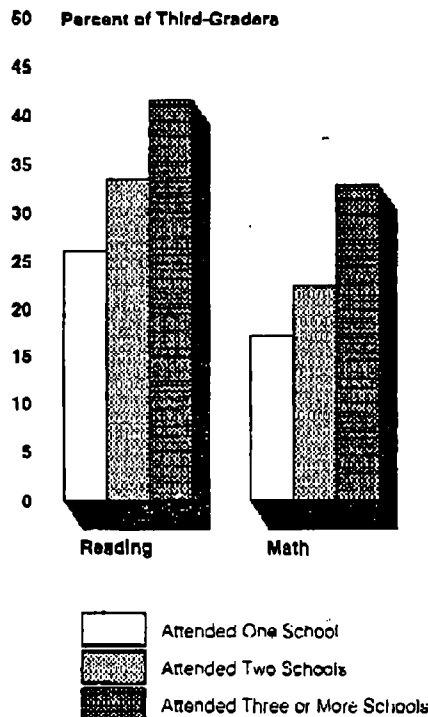
Of the nation's third-graders who have changed schools frequently, 41 percent are low achievers, that is, below grade level, in reading, compared with 26 percent of third-graders who have never changed schools (see fig. 1). Results are similar for math—33 percent of children who have changed schools frequently are below grade level, compared with 17 percent of those who have never changed schools. In grouping the children who have changed schools frequently into four income categories, we found that within each category, these children are more likely to be below grade level in reading and math than those who have never changed schools⁶ (see app. I). Children who have moved often were also more likely to have behavioral problems, according to a recent study.

⁶Unless noted, we did not control for other factors in our analysis.

⁹Children who moved frequently, that is, in the top 10 percent of families surveyed, were 77 percent more likely to have four or more behavioral problems than those with no or infrequent moves. For more information, see David Wood and others, "Impact of Family Relocation on Children's Growth, Development, School Function, and Behavior," Journal of the American Medical Association (Sept. 15, 1993), pp. 1334-38.

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Figure 1: Children Who Have Changed Schools Frequently Are More Likely to Be Low Achievers in Reading and Math



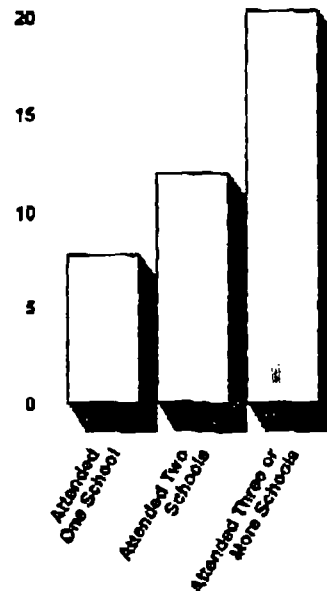
Source: GAO analysis of Prospects Study data.

Overall, third-graders who have changed schools frequently are two-and-a-half times as likely to repeat a grade as third-graders who have never changed schools (20 versus 8 percent) (see fig. 2). For all income groups, children who have changed schools frequently are more likely to repeat a grade than children who have never changed schools (see app. 1).

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Figure 2: Children Who Have Changed Schools Frequently Are More Likely to Repeat a Grade

Percent of Third-Graders



Source: GAO analysis of Prospects Study data.

Children who have changed schools frequently, compared with children who have never changed schools, are more than twice as likely to have nutrition and health or hygiene problems, according to teachers.¹⁰

When children changed schools four or more times, both a Department of Education and a Denver Public Schools study found, they were more likely to drop out of school. Children who changed schools four or more times by eighth grade were at least four times more likely to drop out than those who remained in the same school; this is true even after taking into account the socio-economic status of a child's family, according to the Department study.¹¹ Children who transferred within the district five or

¹⁰For a discussion of comprehensive school-based programs that may help at-risk children with education and health or behavioral problems, see *School-Linked Human Services: A Comprehensive Strategy for Aiding Students at Risk of School Failure* (GAO/HRD-94-21, Dec. 30, 1993).

¹¹See MPR Associates, "Characteristics of At-Risk Students in NELS:88," Conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Department of Education, NCES 92-042 (Aug. 1992), p. 15.

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more times dropped out of school at similarly high rates, regardless of reading achievement scores, the Denver study found.¹²

Except for migrant children, little is currently done to help children whose frequent school changes affect the continuity of their schooling. It may be difficult for teachers to focus on the needs of these children, particularly those who enter after school has started, rather than on maintaining continuity for the rest of the class. When children enter classrooms after the beginning of the year, teachers may prejudge them unfavorably.¹³ Teachers in schools with high proportions of children who change schools after the beginning of the year indicated that these school changes disrupt classroom instruction, and teachers must spend additional time on noninstructional tasks (see app. II). Teachers may therefore not have the time to identify gaps in such a child's knowledge; moreover, these gaps may grow as the child is left on his or her own to make sense of the new curriculum and its relation to the one at the previous school.¹⁴ Children who changed schools often, except for migrant children, did not receive specialized educational services, researchers have noted.¹⁵

¹²Ridge A. Hammons and Miles C. Olson, "Interschool Transfer and Dropout: Some Findings and Suggestions," National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin (Sept. 1988), p. 136.

¹³Joan Newman, "What Should We Do About the Highly Mobile Student?," Research Brief (Mount Vernon, Wash.: Educational School District 189, 1988). See also, Carl Sewell, "The Impact of Pupil Mobility on the Assessment of Achievement and Its Implications for Program Planning" (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Community School District 17, 1982).

¹⁴Andres A. Lash and Sandra L. Kirkpatrick, "A Classroom Perspective on Student Mobility," The Elementary School Journal (Nov. 1990), pp. 177-91.

¹⁵According to our analyses of data from the Research Triangle Institute study and the 1993 Digest of Education Statistics, the number of elementary school children who change schools frequently is about 10 times the total number of migrant children in elementary school. Therefore, the majority of children who change schools frequently are unlikely to receive help.

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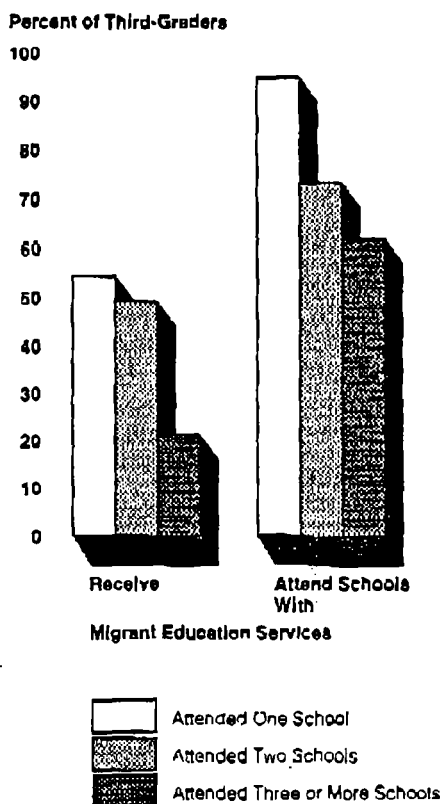
**Migrant Children Who
Have Changed
Schools Frequently
Are Less Likely Than
Those Not Changing
Schools to Receive
Migrant Education
Program Services**

Of migrant third-graders who have attended three or more schools since first grade, 21 percent receive migrant services, compared with 54 percent of migrants who have not changed schools at all (see fig. 3).¹⁶ These results are surprising since the Migrant Education Act is intended to address, to a large degree, the problems mobility creates for migrant children. Migrant children who have changed schools frequently are less likely to attend schools with migrant education programs than those who have never changed schools (see fig. 3).

¹⁶While the Prospects Study data is based on a nationally representative sample of third-graders, the number of migrants in this sample is small and the sample is not representative of the nation's migrants. These factors could affect the magnitude of the difference between migrant children who change schools frequently and those who have not changed schools. According to our analyses, this difference passed standard tests of statistical significance.

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Figure 3: Migrant Children Who Have Changed Schools Frequently Are Less Likely to Receive Migrant Education Services or Attend Schools Offering Services



Source: GAO analysis of Prospects Study data.

Migrant Program Provisions Allow Many Children Who Have Not Changed School Districts Recently to Receive Services

Provisions of the Migrant Education Act allow services to migrant children who have not changed school districts for as many as 6 years.¹⁷ However, migrant children who have changed school districts more recently have greater educational needs than those who have not changed school districts for 3 or more years, according to our analysis of data presented in a study conducted for the Department of Education by Research Triangle Institute (RTI).¹⁸ For example, for reading and language arts, about 50 percent of those who have changed school districts within the last 2

¹⁷Children who have changed school districts within the year, that is, currently migrant, are eligible for migrant education services. Moreover, they may receive services as formerly migrant children for an additional 5 years, up to a total of 6 years.

¹⁸Research Triangle Institute, *Descriptive Study of the Chapter 1 Migrant Education Program, Volume I, Study Findings and Conclusions* (Research Triangle Park, N.C.: Research Triangle Institute, 1992). Prepared under contract to the U.S. Department of Education.

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years fell below the 35th percentile. In comparison, teachers estimated, about 35 percent or less of those who have not changed school districts within the last 3 years fell below the 35th percentile, about what one would expect from an average group of students.¹⁹ Results are generally similar for math.

While states are required to give priority to currently migrant children, these children are less likely to receive either instructional or support services from the Migrant Education Program than children who are formerly migrant (80 versus 85 percent). When we look at instructional services alone, currently migrant children are more likely than formerly migrant children to be served (60 versus 50 percent). However, of all the children who receive instructional services from the Migrant Education Program, the majority (61 percent) are formerly migrant; about half of the formerly migrant children receiving instructional services have not move within the last 3 years, according to the RTI study (see app. III).

Chapter 1 Participation Rates Lower for Low-Achieving Children Who Have Changed Schools Frequently Than for Low-Achieving Children Who Have Never Changed Schools

Low-achieving children who have changed schools frequently are less likely to receive Chapter 1 services than low-achieving children who have never changed schools. Of third-graders who have never changed schools and read below grade level, 25 percent receive Chapter 1 reading services. In contrast, 20 percent of third-graders who have changed schools frequently and read below grade level receive these services.²⁰ In grades kindergarten through 5, approximately 90,000 additional low-achieving children who have changed schools frequently could receive Chapter 1 reading services if the program provided these services at the same rates to these children as to low-achieving children who have never changed schools.

¹⁹It is clear that (1) children who have changed school districts within the last 2 years are substantially more likely than average to be low achieving and (2) those who have not changed school districts for 3 or more years appear no more likely than average to be low achieving. However, the case is less clear for children who have changed school districts between 2 and 3 years—they are only somewhat more likely than average to be low achieving.

²⁰When we excluded those children in schools or grades where Chapter 1 reading services were not available, we found similar differences between the two groups of children: 43 percent of low achievers who have never changed schools receive Chapter 1 reading services compared with 37 percent for those low achievers who have changed schools frequently.

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Lack of Chapter 1 Data to Explain the Lower Chapter 1 Participation Rates of Children Who Have Changed Schools Frequently

The Department of Education has little information on children who change schools frequently and their participation in the Chapter 1 program, as well as the effects that children moving frequently from school to school have had on Chapter 1 services. Therefore, we were unable to explain why low-achieving children who have changed schools frequently may be less likely to be served by Chapter 1 than low-achieving children who have never changed schools. A 1992 Department of Education policy instructs districts to reserve adequate funds so that migrant children who are eligible for Chapter 1 services—even if they arrive late in the school year—will receive them. But nonmigrant children who change schools frequently and are also eligible for Chapter 1 services are omitted in this policy.

Timely and Comparable Student Record Systems Are One Way to Help Children Who Have Changed Schools Frequently, Including Migrants

Without student records containing recent assessment data, classroom placements may not reflect children's needs for services. In some districts with high rates of student mobility, no assessments of late entrants may be conducted because of a lack of staff time, even when no student records are available. For example, one educator, surveyed in a California study, noted that "if a student comes in our busiest time . . . without a transcript, we put her in her age-appropriate class. Sometimes it takes weeks before the teacher realizes a mistake has been made. We simply don't have time to do extensive testing anymore."²¹

According to some researchers, as well as state and district officials, timely and comparable record systems are one way to help children who move frequently, including those served by federal education programs, to better adjust to a new school.²² Across districts and states, current student record systems vary as to (1) data elements included and (2) how the records are transferred, by mail or electronically. The most commonly used mode of transferring student records—by mail—can be cumbersome and time-consuming. In one state, local officials reported, it often takes 2 to 6 weeks before a new child's records arrive. In a school with a high mobility rate, teachers rarely used student records to place children,

²¹California Student Information System, "A Study of the Feasibility of Implementing a Statewide Process for Electronically Sharing Student Information: Executive Summary," Collaborative Effort by the California Department of Education, the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, and the California Education Data Processing Association (Oct. 1992), p. 5.

²²See, for example, Andrea Lash and Sandra Kirkpatrick, "A Classroom Perspective on Student Mobility," *The Elementary School Journal* (Nov. 1990), pp. 177-91; "Highly Mobile Students: Educational Problems and Possible Solutions," ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, New York, N.Y. (June 1991); The Project Description of the California Student Information System, California Department of Education (Apr. 13, 1992); and Joan Newiman, "What Should We Do About the Highly Mobile Student?" (1988).

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teachers we interviewed noted, because these records usually arrived days or weeks after the children transferred or not at all.

The MSRTS, the federal system that tracks migrant children, is slow, incomplete, and used infrequently, according to recent studies.²³ With the MSRTS, records take about 1 week, on average, from the time of a request to the arrival of a hard copy; however, it is not uncommon for records to take up to a month to arrive. Because few school districts are on-line, records must be printed out at the MSRTS center in Little Rock, Arkansas, and mailed to the school districts; sometimes, records must first go through a regional Migrant Education office. Over half of all student records lack test data and, frequently, instructional and health data. School staff working in the Migrant Education Program are much more likely to use records sent from the old school than records from the MSRTS, staff report, primarily because of the small proportion of migrant children in most school districts.

The operation of the MSRTS is expected to be considered this year in conjunction with the reauthorization of the Migrant Education Program in the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988. Public Law 103-59, enacted in August 1993, extends the contract for the operation of the MSRTS until such time as the Secretary of Education determines is necessary, but not later than June 30, 1995. The cost to operate the MSRTS center in Little Rock, Arkansas, averages about \$6 million annually; this does not include the cost of data entry and system maintenance at the state and local levels, which has been estimated to be over \$9 million annually.

New Record Transfer System Shows Promise

California is one of a few states that have recently begun to pilot an electronic student record format, eXpress; it is expected to be used to transfer the records of all children, not just migrants. The format is based on common data standards for transferring student records and was developed by a group of state and local educators with experience in information management; these efforts were funded by the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). With eXpress, California officials estimate, the use of these common data standards would reduce the time needed to evaluate the content of a student record—for example, to determine whether a student has taken the

²³See Research Triangle Institute, *Descriptive Study of the Chapter 1 Migrant Education Program*, Volume I, Study Findings and Conclusions (1992). See also, National Commission on Migrant Education, *Keeping Up with Our Nation's Migrant Students: A Report on the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS)* (Bethesda, Md.: National Commission on Migrant Education, 1991).

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equivalent of a certain type of course.²⁴ The use of EXPRESS to electronically transfer student records may also generate savings by cutting costs of record transfer, retesting, and reinimmunization, as well as reporting student data to state and federal agencies. A full evaluation to assess costs and benefits of EXPRESS has not yet been conducted, however, because EXPRESS has only been piloted in a few states and has not been fully implemented in any state. (See app. IV for further details.)

The National Education Goals Panel believes that as states and districts adopt comparable student record systems, (1) educators will be equipped with better data to help children and (2) policymakers will be better able to monitor progress towards the National Education Goals because the progress of all children can be recorded, even that of those who change schools, school districts, or states (see app. IV). To help in monitoring progress towards the goals, the panel has recommended developing a voluntary, uniform state and district record system for children. The panel recommended that the data elements contained in these records be consistent with those developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and NCES. Better student record systems may improve states' and districts' ability to determine whether children who change schools frequently are provided with the help they need, according to the developers of the EXPRESS system.

Conclusions

Children who change schools frequently face many challenges to their success in school. Such change can cause disruption and add to the other challenges—low-income, limited English proficiency, and migrant status—that make learning and achievement difficult for them. Nevertheless, many of the children who change schools frequently may be less likely to receive Migrant Education and Chapter 1 programs services than other children meeting program eligibility standards.

As the nation moves to setting high standards for all children, those who are failing by current standards may be even more likely to fail. How can low-achieving and migrant children who change schools frequently be helped to meet these high standards? One potential help is improved access to Chapter 1 services, for which such children are often eligible but not necessarily served. Another possibility is to better focus Migrant Education Program funding on the migrant children most in need of

²⁴California Student Information System, "A Study of the Economic Feasibility of Implementing Electronic Student Record Transfer in California: A Benefit-Cost Analysis," Collaborative Effort by the California Department of Education, the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, and the California Education Data Processing Association, Review Draft (Feb. 6, 1993).

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services, for example, migrant children who have changed school districts in the last 2 school years. If funding were more focused on these children, a greater proportion of these children could be served by local migrant education programs or such programs could offer those children most in need more intensive services.

Finally, another potential area of assistance is improved or new student record systems. These systems would not guarantee better delivery of services to children who change schools frequently, but they could help school personnel to make more timely and informed judgments about the services these students need, including those that federal programs might provide. In addition, improved state and local record systems, which are intended to cover all children, could make the existing separate federal record system for migrant children (MSRTS) unnecessary in the long run.

Matters for Congressional Consideration

Given the great educational needs of migrant children who have changed school districts recently, Congress may wish to consider focusing migrant education funding to give higher priority to such children. This could be accomplished, for example, by limiting eligibility for federal Migrant Education Program services only to migrant children who have changed school districts within the last 2 years, rather than continuing program eligibility to formerly migrant children who have not changed school districts for as many as 6 years.

Recommendations to the Department of Education

We recommend that the Department of Education (1) determine the reason(s) for the low Chapter 1 participation rates of low-achieving children who have changed schools frequently and (2) develop strategies so that all eligible children who have changed schools frequently, including migrant children, will have access to Chapter 1 services.

We also recommend that the Department of Education determine the feasibility of using electronic student record systems, such as those currently being adopted by some states and school districts for all students, instead of the MSRTS.

Agency Comments

The Department of Education provided written comments on a draft of this report (see app. V). The Department generally agreed with our recommendation about determining the reason(s) for the low Chapter 1 participation rates of low-achieving children who have changed schools

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frequently to ensure that these children receive needed services. It suggested that better record transfer systems may be one way to ensure that school districts provide services to children who enter schools at any time during the school year.

Moreover, the Department generally agreed with our recommendation about developing strategies so that all eligible children, including those who have changed schools frequently, will be selected for services on the same basis. It suggested that its proposals to expand schoolwide Chapter 1 programs and encourage systemic planning at the district level were steps in this direction. We agree that these proposals may help children who change schools frequently. However, because many Chapter 1 schools will not have schoolwide programs, even under the administration's recent proposal, we continue to believe that the Department should develop additional strategies to ensure that low-achieving children who change schools frequently have the same access to Chapter 1 services as other children.

The Department also agreed with our recommendation that it determine the feasibility of replacing the MSRTS with electronic student record systems, such as those currently being adopted by some states and school districts. It also stated that it is currently investigating other options for student record transfer. In our report, we note that little evaluation data exist on the EXPRESS system. In examining the feasibility of EXPRESS, we agree with the Department that other record transfer options, as well as their feasibility, should also be examined.

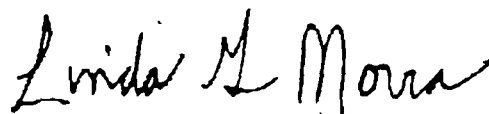
Although the Department commented that we had identified an important issue—that children who change schools frequently do not receive federally funded services to the same extent as children who do not change schools—it raised a concern about the use of the Prospects Study data to generalize about migrant students. We had recognized that while the Prospects data are based on a nationally representative sample of third-graders, the number of migrants in this sample is generally small and not representative of the nation's migrants. For this reason, we had supplemented our analyses of the Prospects Study data with secondary analysis of data from the RTI study—based on a nationally representative sample of migrants.²⁵ We also responded to additional technical comments provided by the Department, as appropriate.

²⁵Research Triangle Institute, *Descriptive Study of the Chapter 1 Migrant Education Program, Volume I, Study Findings and Conclusions* (1992).

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We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Education, appropriate congressional committees, and other interested parties. If you wish to discuss the contents of this report, please call me on (202) 512-7014. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix 'A'.

Sincerely,



Linda G. Morra
Director, Education and Employment Issues